**Stand by me**

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# Stand by me

by fyeahgila

Summary

AU. Will is suffering from depression. For years he has been fighting the demons in his head that have been haunting him since his childhood. In order to silence them, his only salvation seems to commit suicide. Then a complete stranger is showing up, saving his life in more than just one way...

Notes

Hey there, guys!
I had this same story up on fanfiction net, under my penname Freddie Lounds, but I had to take it down due to some unfortunate and really shitty circumstances in my personal life.
So now I'm giving this story a 2nd shot and I really hope that some of you guys who maybe already followed it on ff net also are willing to go on supporting me here. I'll post all the chapters I had so far pretty soon and in the meantime I'll also be working on the next chapters :)
As for those of you, who haven't read it yet and are new to this story, I really do hope you do enjoy it!

# The Second Time

Harsh December wind, cold as ice, blew raindrops in his face and blurred his view, as he was standing at the balustrade above the grey river. But he didn't care about getting cold or getting wet, not anymore, certainly not at this point. His hands clinged to the railing, gripping it so hard, that his knuckles were turning white.
He had planned it all, if not too precicely, but he'd cared about the place he'd be doing it. He'd been thinking about ending it all for quite some time now. Almost two years, to be accurate.

For years he had lived in fear and pain, mental torture, as a prisoner of his own mind. Of course he went to see doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists to talk about his condition. They gave him medicine to take, that made him gain weight and feel sleepy all day and in the end turned out to be another reason he tried to commit suicide for the first time. That was ten months ago.

Then he took pills, but when he was lying there unconscious, his dogs gave him away by barking and barking, until a neighbour looked after what was going on. So he was brought to a hospital and saved. For that time. Now he didn't want to give it another shot at home, in his appartment, where his dogs were to save him. So he decided to jump off a bridge. This just didn't come to his mind that very morning, obviously. You don't get up and think: oh, today's a nice day to jump off of the next bridge, isn't it?
No. Rather he had been thinking of it for the last few weeks and this particular bridge, a little outside of town, seemed to be the right place. It was December, means, it was getting dark already in late afternoon, so the possibility that someone could see him ending his life was pretty low. His two dogs were safe at the animal shelter, he could never just have left them back alone in the flat.

That was actually the only thing he still cared about. His dogs. Maybe, if it wasn't for them, he wouldn't even have made it that far and would long be gone already. But in last time, not even they could manage to bring some purpose, some joy to his life.

Joy. He couldn't even remember anymore, when he had felt somehow close to being happy during the last years. All he knew, was darkness and pain, anxiety and loneliess. All the time he felt, like he'd been forgotten by the world, a world he couldn't be a part of, because he just didn't seem to fit in. His fears just made it impossible for him to fit in.
In the end, all his inner demons had driven him there, made him stand at the railing of a bridge on an icy December evening. It didn't take him much to pull himself over the balustrade and stand on the small step, all that was still separating him from what seemed to be his final salvation, was his steady grip on the railing. By now, his eyes had gotten used to the darkness around him – the last city lights seemed to be light years away, but actually he was just a few miles outside of town. Far enough away from anyone to find him here, he had guessed.

If asked later, he wouldn't be able to explain what held him back so long from just letting himself fall down in the grey and icy waters. Maybe it was the tiniest bit of will for life, that was still left, somewhere deep deep in his innermost core. Or maybe it was fate, that made

him hesitate for a longer moment than anticipated. A moment, that saved his life, again. A moment, that gave someone the chance to save him from death by drowning in the cold flood, drowning in his own, dark thoughts. Because just as he loosened the grip, ready to embrace death, someone laid an arm around his chest from behind, giving him hold and pulling him back.
For an instant, he was too buffled to do anything more, than standing stiff, then he tried to pull away and tumble down, but this strong someone behind him, now held him with both arms in a hard grip, forcing him to calm down.

"You don't actually want to do that, my friend", said the man in his back, pressing him against the balustrade and himself. His voice was deep and you could make out the hint of a foreign accent in it.

"How would you know, what I want?", he answered almost disparaging, his own voice broken by his heavy breathing, while he still was trying to get out of the other man's hold. But he was too strong for him, making him give up at last, because he also didn't even have the will to fight him any longer.
As the other one felt that he had given up his struggle, he said:

"Let me help you to get back onto safe ground here"

And without much effort, he pulled him safely back over the railing, where he almost collapsed, but the stranger held him steady, until his legs seemed to be able to carry him again.

"My name is Dr. Hannibal Lecter. May I ask for your name?", the man said in a calm, encouraging voice, trying to look him in the face, but he stubbornly avoided to lift his gaze.

"Will...Will Graham", he finally muttered, not yet able to understand what just had happened.

He had been saved from committing suicide for a second time. By a complete stranger, whom he never would have expected to show up in this place, at this time. Maybe it really was fate, that didn't want to allow him to pass away just yet. Maybe he was also too unlucky to end his own misery.

Still Will couldn't bring himself to look up and take in the man who saved him. He kinda hated him for doing so. Why couldn't he just have left him alone? Why did he have to show up in the last moment and force him to keep dealing with life, when he didn't want to face this struggle any longer?

"You're cold", the doctor observed and now that he said it, Will actually just realised, that he was trembling from cold, as he was only wearing a sweater, no jacket.

"Here, take that", he stepped out of his coat and laid it around Will's shoulders.

For the first time, he lifted his gaze from the ground and found two light brown eyes looking him over, concerned. Only for a second he let his view stay on the other man's eyes, too much did he hate eye contact. He just couldn't deal with seeing other people's emotions there, but even less he liked others to see his own. Dr. Lecter's facial structure was extraordinarily

defined. High cheekbones and sharp pointed lips. Eyebrows he could barely make out in the pale moonlight. His light brown hair was accurately combed back with some gel. Just as he was examining him, Will could feel Hannibal doing the same with him and wondered, what he could read of his face, already disliking the bare thought of that.

"I would suggest to bring you somewhere safe and warm. Where you can stay and where's taken care of you", Hannibal said next and without Will protesting, lead him to his car.
He just couldn't bring up any effort anymore, since he was too overwhelmed by everything and pretty close to have a breakdown, so he let Hannibal help him with getting into the car and then, as they drove off, he must have passed out, because he didn't remember anything else.

# First Insights

Chapter Notes

> Thank you so much for your interest in this story! I was really surprised by all the clicks and stuff :) Also thanks for the feedback I already got, I'm always open to it! If you find something to criticize, just let me know and I'll try to do better the next time :)

As he regained consciousness again he was lying in a bed, that wasn't his own, in some hospital room. He didn't have to open his eyes to know, he could smell it; hospitals all had this certain smell of sterility matched with disinfectant.

So, when he could finally find some energy to open his tired eyes, his head was spinning a little, until he got used to the bright daylight flooding into the room. It had snowed during the night, so everything seemed even brighter. Annoying.

He couldn't stand it and blinked against the lightness. When he could see clear and focus, he noticed the other man sitting in a chair across the room, looking as tired as he felt. For a moment Will didn't have a clue who this was and he couldn't remember what himself would be in a hospital for.

Then everything dawned on him and he let out a more than annoyed sigh. He still was alive. This made the other one realize that Will was awake and a slight smile spread across his face, which Will hated.

Why was Dr. Lecter here? Why did he smile at him, couldn't he just stop it? People who were in a good mood in the morning got to his nerves endlessly. And this man did in particular, because he was the reason Will was still here and had to bear all of this.

"Good morning, Will", Hannibal said then. "Do you remember me?"

Will almost snorted, but he could hold it in.

"How would I be able forget you?", he gave back sarcastically.

"Why are you here? And why were you there last evening? Where did you just show up from?!"

Will shot all those questions at the doctor, his voice raised and there was far more rage inside him than he'd guessed.

"You did have no right to just...to be there and...", he was outraged, fumbling for words.

"To save you?", Hannibal threw in, remarkably calm in the face of Will's outburst.

"Yeah, that", Will said derogatory.

"Do you intend to go on screaming at me for saving your life, or do you want me to give you the answers to your prior questions?", Dr. Lecter asked him and for a second Will was torn between keeping on ranting and just giving in.

In the end he made a snorting sound and fell back into his pillows, not saying another word.

"To answer your questions...", Hannibal started, completely unimpressed by Will's behavior.

"I am here to check on you. I wanted to see how you're doing. And since I'm working in this hospital, I just stopped by before I have to start working my shift soon. Last night I was on my way home after I'd seen my last patient...", he went on, but hanging in there for a moment, as if to gather his thoughts.

"At first I wasn't sure what I'd seen, when I passed by the bridge in my car. But then I looked back and recognized how you were just pulling yourself over the balustrade. Obviously it was fairly clear to me, what you were about doing and I stopped the car immediately. You didn't even seem to have noticed me driving by...and then I run over to stop you", the doctor reported, Will listening, still annoyed at everything and everyone.

"What kind of doctor are you?", he wanted to know, not being able to hold back that question, although he wanted to hate that man and best talk to him as less as possible.

"I started out as a surgeon, but now I'm a psychiatrist", Dr. Lecter explained, what brought him in another disrespectful snort by Will.

"I can imagine that you don't seem to be very fond of my kind and I don't know what your story is, what brought you to the point you are at now. I do understand, however, that you may have hatred and anger directed against me at the moment. I did ruin your plans, didn't I?", he just went on, unimpressed by Will's decline.

"What do you want from me?", Will asked, glaring at him angrily.
He didn't like the tone this doctor was using to talk to him, too much was he reminded of all the appointments he had had with psychiatrists in his life. All of those had not been too well on him at all.

"I don't want you to do anything", the doctor answered calmly.

By now this upset Will as well. This disgusting calmness and self-control of the doctor. Hadn't he just screamed at him and made it more than obvious, that he couldn't stand him? And despite all of this that man remained calm and chilled, well, probably he had experienced worse patients already.

"I would like for you to find a way to want to keep on living. It's not a hard thing to tell, that you're a deeply disturbed and broken man, Will. Whatever it is, that has brought you to this place where you are at now, I would wish for you to find a way out of this darkness"

For a moment, both of them were silent. Hannibal seemed to be waiting for a reaction of Will and Will just needed a moment to think about what the doctor just had said.
When he had processed so far as to give an answer, it was another decline directed at the other. However, even if he had not intended to, in his agitation, he gave away some more detail about himself, even if only a small one.

"I have talked to people like you for uncountable times. I've...been sitting around in doctor's offices since I can remember...I was sixteen when I first was brought to a psychologist, because one of my high school teachers ordered it. Can't you just understand, that I don't have any nerve to do this anymore?!", Will finally said, but it didn't sound angry, as he'd planned it to. It sounded deeply desperate. Just as he was.

Because clearly, all his rage was just the last façade he could manage to bring up. And Hannibal seemed to know that and looked at him, understanding. Seeing this look on his face, Will already hated to have told him that information, because hadn't he decided not to talk to him?

Now he felt like the doctor might turn this into some session every moment, because Will was too done to bring up any true walls, besides his ranting. Clearly the doctor must have noticed that. But to Will's surprise and even more so to his relief, Hannibal didn't press on that topic. Not yet.

He sensed, that it would be way too soon. Obviously there was much that Will had to tell, even more that he didn't want to tell at all, but he didn't dare to ask of him to do so now. This would probably be exactly the wrong thing to do. Hannibal only could guess that much so far: he couldn’t tell why, but he knew somehow, that Will would be an interesting patient. And most of all, he wanted to help him. He had saved him from jumping to his death, but he clearly had not saved his life yet.

Will was in a completely unstable condition, one didn't need to be a psychiatrist to see that much. Hannibal intended in any case, to keep offering his help to the pale man with the curly dark hair and even darker circles around his eyes, who seemed so fragile lying in this hospital bed. But for now, he decided that he shouldn't do much more, but leave him to rest. And he had to go to his office anyway, his first appointment would be starting soon.

"I have to excuse myself now. My shift is starting in twenty minutes and I should better leave for my office now", he said with a look to his watch, rising from the chair.

"You don't need to check in on me again", Will said, as if he'd read Hannibal's thoughts, who has wanted to offer just that.

"When will I be out of here? Or what is actually gonna happen to me now? I don't think I'll be allowed to go home, am I?", he asked, ironically.

"No, I fear not. Apart from your breakdown and light hypothermia from last night, that has been surveyed here, you're not a case for internal medicine. So I guess, you'll soon be transferred to the psychiatric department. And since I took your case, you will have to attend sessions with me. I'm going to stop by later to let you know when your first appointment will be."

"I don't need that. I don't want to talk to you!", Will started to protest again.

This elicited a small sigh of Hannibal, who could tell by now, that Will wouldn't be an easy patient. But actually he liked this. It brought some additional challenge to his job.

"See, I want to help you to escape from whatever is haunting you. This is what I want. I'm not the bad one, Will, I'm not the reason you're in this dark place. Rather I want to offer you a lifeline, pulling you back out of there. And therefore I need you to let this happen. Do you understand me?", Hannibal explained, he'd stepped closer to Will's bed, looking at him, but the other – as most of the time – avoided his gaze.

As he didn't get a reply, Hannibal held back another sigh, thinking once more how incredibly stubborn and negative his latest patient was. But it wasn’t surprising him at all, seeing that he apparently was suffering from depression.

Since he couldn’t do anything more for the moment, he turned away, to give Will some space and to finally make his way to his office.

# Not American

Chapter Notes

> Thanks for your support, guys, I am overwhelmed with the amount of hits on this story :) Also thank you for the feedback, I'm always happy to try and make reading the most enjoyable for everyone!

"Mr. Graham, you have to attend your session with Dr. Lecter..."

"No, I don't have to do anything", he stubbornly gave back, as the nurse was trying to persuade him, for the umpteenth time now, to go and see Dr. Lecter.

"It is obligatory."

"Listen, I don't care what it is, I don't have to do anything!", he said, voice raised and he started to feel hot anger rising up inside of him. Clenching his fists, he tried to inhale deeply, because he could sense, that it wouldn't take much more for him to forget himself. It wasn't always easy for him to not lose his temper.

"I don't want to do anything. I really cannot see how it would make things better, if I talked to another psychiatrist; I already talked to so many", he added after a moment, mumbling, still trying not to freak out and just turned around in his bed, so that he didn't have to face the nurse anymore. He didn't care if he was being rude, or seemed childish, he just wanted to be left alone.

"But it's required for you to attend these sessions! You need to go, if you want to get out of the hospital!", the nurse explained, now not so reasonable anymore, seemingly annoyed by his obstinacy.

"Yeah, well, maybe I don't want to get out of here, I don't know what to...", he started complaining, but then stopped himself, when noticing that he was about giving the nurse too much information about himself. He didn't like that at all.

"Well, Mr. Graham, I think in that case, if you don't want to go to your therapy session, it has to come to you", the nurse said, with a voice, that didn't seem to allow any resistance and left, probably to go and get Dr. Lecter over here, since Will wouldn't be brought to go to his office.

When the nurse had left the room, Will took the pillow and pressed his face into it, wondering if maybe he could use it to suffocate himself. But he doubted, that it would be of any use, so he just laid there, pillow on his face, like a stubborn little kid.

Actually he just couldn't stand to see the bright yellow-ish walls and pictures of flowers anymore. That's how the rooms here on the psychiatric floor looked like, a weak attempt to make them seem nice and invitational. Will hated it.

Also the bright sunlight, intensified by the snow outside, that flooded into the room – through windows that could only be tilted not fully opened, obviously so that people couldn't jump out or do anything stupid -, seemed incredibly annoying to him. He couldn't stand it and didn't want to see it anymore.

Lying there like that, almost dozing off – because sleep was the only thing he could somehow bear, as long as nightmares didn't haunt him – he didn't hear the soft knock at the door.

"Good afternoon, Will", Dr. Lecter's voice made him want to punch the wall. How could he always sound so calm and encouraging, like he tried to spread a good mood, wherever he was going? Disgusting.

"I could be asleep", Will muttered under the pillow, which obviously made his words barely understandable. Somehow the doctor managed to hear him anyway.

"You wouldn't, your whole posture is too clenched and tensed for being asleep", Dr. Lecter said and Will suddenly felt the urge to punch him, not only an inanimate object. Why couldn't he just leave him alone?
"What is it with the pillow? A new way of avoiding eye contact? You don't seem to be very fond of it, are you?", the doctor commented, while sitting down on the chair next to Will's bed.

Will's sigh was absorbed by the pillow, then he finally lifted it off his face, because he suddenly found it hard to breath.

"Eyes are distracting. You see too much, you don't see enough...", he trailed off again, wondering why he answered the doctor's question in the first place.
He really couldn't stand the man and wanted him to leave, he didn't want to talk to him. Yet he did and he couldn't explain why.

"So, I've been told, that I would have to pay you a visit here, if I wanted the chance to talk to you", Dr. Lecter went on.

"Only that I really don't want to talk to you", Will gave back, dismissively.

"Oh, I don't think so. I can see that there's a lot inside your mind that you maybe would like to share."

"And why would I share it with you? What does make you different? I already talked to so many psychiatrists...psychologist...so many. It didn't help, did it?"

"Because I know that I can help you. I saved your life, didn't I? Now it's your turn. You can decide to talk to me and give me a chance to help you to eventually feel better, or you can't. But I am a patient man, Will. I can sit and wait. And you'll talk, eventually, I can tell you this much", Dr. Lecter gave back.

Will only replied with an incredulous laugh. Did this man actually think he knew, what he'd be doing in the end? Also why did he think, that if a dozen others couldn't make things better for Will that he could?

"I read on your medical record", Dr. Lecter said, trying to organize all the information about Will that he had in mind.

Light form of Asperger's, which explained his rejections when it comes to eye-contact and leading conversations without seeming reluctant. Hospitalization due to aggressive episodes, mental breakdowns. Abusive father, this point seemed to be crucial to Hannibal, but obviously also the thing Will would most likely be less open to talk about. Five different psychiatrists, just as many psychologists, some of whom Hannibal knew and therefore could tell, that their reputation really wasn't the best. Compared to them, he obviously could tell Will, without bad conscience, that he could help him, presumed that Will would let him. A history of several medications and another hospitalization due to attempted suicide not even a year ago were on the list as well.

"This wasn't the first time you tried to take your life", he meant, trying to study Will's reaction, who, as always, kept avoiding his gaze and crossed his arms in front of his chest. But there wasn't any answer, probably since he just had made a statement and not asked a question.
"Do you have anyone who could visit you? Give you some support and stability while you're here?", Hannibal went on, because he realized, that it wouldn't do any good to Will to talk about his attempt suicides just yet.

"Do I look stable to you?", the other gave back, ironically.

"So, no friends, family?"

"I've never had family", Will answered, pretty shortcut, starring at a point on the wall to Hannibal's left. Alone the way he pronounced that last word confirmed the doctor's assumption.

"What did happen?"

"I don't wanna talk about it. How about talking about your family?", Will answered, grimly, glaring at Hannibal and it was more than obvious, that he hit some target there.

"My parents died when I was a boy. So did my sister", he gave away in the hope that it would maybe encourage Will. Usually he didn't like to talk about it as well, so in this point, he could understand his patient perfectly. The difference was, that in Will's case, it mattered to know more about his background, because he could sense, that in there lay the clue.

Will bit his lower lip, nodding lightly in comprehension. He didn't expect that the doctor would allow him to turn the wheel and ask him questions that he usually was being asked. Neither did he anticipate a reply like that.

"What happened to you then?", Will went on, not sparing a thought whether this reaction might be improper, because he could never tell if he was. Rather he was surprised that he

seemed to be interested enough to go on asking.

"I lived with my uncle, who sent me to a boarding school in Paris"

"You're not American", Will commented on what he'd noticed right away when he first heard Hannibal talking.

"I'm Lithuanian", the doctor enlightened him. He couldn't quite figure yet, whether Will just tried to avoid Hannibal questioning him, or truly seemed to be interested in a conversation.

"You told me yesterday that you were sixteen, when your teacher first made you see a psychologist. Why did she think you needed to?", he asked after a moment of silence, trying to steer back to turning this into a session where he could actually get something out of Will.

"Isn't this on the record?", Will just replied.

"Would I ask, if it was?", Hannibal returned, in a voice that implied he wouldn't leave earlier, before Will at least started to cooperate with him.

# Flashbacks and dogs

"You told me yesterday that you were sixteen, when your teacher first made you see a psychologist. Why did she think you needed to?", Dr. Lecter wanted to know, looking at Will expectantly.

He didn't intend to really get into talking with the psychiatrist right now, he just didn't feel like it. So, what Will did, was to keep on staring at the bright yellow wall behind the doctor, trying to figure out, why he should lay his trust in him. One thing was for sure by now, at least he wasn't quite as annoying as the other psychiatrists he had used to see.

Although, Dr. Lecter, obviously, annoyed him on another level, since he actually was the reason, why Will even still was there. But he didn't try to be fake empathetic or to safeguard him exorbitantly, as if he was still a kid. Well, at least he didn't try yet.

"How was school for you? Have you been a good student, or didn't you like it a lot?", the doctor asked, intending again to make him talk.

"I don't think these two things have a lot to do with each other. You can be a good student, but still hate going to school", Will gave back, summing up his whole experience with school, without getting too precisely.

"Fair point. So, you've been writing straight As?", Dr. Lecter tried to be encouraging.

"I got a scholarship for college", he said, shortcut.

"But you don't have a degree", the psychiatrist commented.

"Is it required to have one?", Will gave back, a rhetorical question.

He already started to dislike this topic of conversation. The reason why he finally dropped out of college was obviously his mental state, but he didn't like at all to talk about that. It just made him feel uncomfortable. But then, when did he actually feel comfortable with anything ever?

"Of course not. What did you study?", Dr. Lecter asked and Will wasn't sure whether he wanted to know this, because he tried to calm him down a bit, before going on with asking the real important questions, or if he was actually interested in knowing.

"I started with psychology, kinda ironical, isn't it?", he answered with a fake laugh.

"Do you see it like this?"

"I was interested in the subject and I...I thought I could maybe figure out...", Will started, but then trailed off again, not sure whether to speak it out aloud. But the doctor seemed to know, what he had wanted to say, anyway.

"You thought you could figure out like this, what might be wrong with you?", he promptly dag deeper.

There it was. The thing Will hated most about these people. You tell them one single thing, or you don't even tell them, and they start to peel you like an onion. Obviously Will didn't answer this question, but just this seemed to be enough for the doctor to know.

"When did you start feeling that there might be something wrong with you?" This wasn't a tough question to answer, for sure.

"When others started treating me like it."

"Whom do you mean when you say "others"?", Dr. Lecter went on asking.

"Classmates, sometimes random people on the street, my father...", Will said, suddenly feeling emotionally exhausted from these questions.

Memories started to break in over him again, like they did thousands of times before, all of them unpleasant ones. He could feel how his body started shaking lightly and felt queasy. Pictures flushing through his head, some darker than others, some so dark, he'd long not dared even trying to think back of them.

His head started spinning and suddenly he wasn't quite sure, where he actually was right now. Reality and memories seemed to blend into each other and he started breathing heavily. He couldn't see clear, couldn't focus anymore and felt like being pulled into a swirl of past memories...

"Will! Will, do you hear me?!", some distant voice tried to get him back and someone was gripping his right upper arm. Still he felt everything like from inside a tunnel, but as the grip on his arm intensified a bit and another hand patted his cheek, he managed to turn his consciousness back to the here and now. Away from the darkness.

He was in that disgustingly bright room on the psychiatric floor of the local hospital. And Dr. Lecter was leaning over him, a hand still on his arm, as to remind him, that he was real, because he could be touched and feel. His breath was still unsteady and he felt like he'd just run half a mile.

"Here, look at me...look at me", Dr. Lecter said, as he realized that Will seemed to be back. He tried to clear his blurred view, blinking, in order to see the doctor clearly. Will focused his gaze on the doctor's face, without directly looking him in the eyes.
"Look at me", he repeated a bit more forcing, to make sure that his patient actually retrieved his senses. And Will reluctantly obeyed, lifting his gaze a bit, taking in the other's light brown eyes. There his own confusion met the doctor's, but there was also concern and relieve in Dr. Lecter's look.

"Good", Hannibal said, when noticing, that Will would be physically okay again - it wasn't something neurological, but obviously a psychological trauma that he had to dig deeper into over the next time. Then he gave him a small encouraging smile, taking his hand back from Will's arm.

"You are going to be alright. Does this happen more often?"

"When...when it's triggered", he answered in a shaken voice, coughing to get it back to normal.

"Here, take a sip", the psychiatrist offered, handing him the mug on the bedside table.

Obviously Hannibal had tried to get some reaction out of Will by making him answer to his questions, but he hadn't quite thought that he'd get such a strong physical one. It was almost incredible to see, how deep these things in Will's mind - whichever they might exactly be - seemed to be affecting him on all levels.

Also somehow each of the topics they'd just ripped into, seemed to be linked up. At the moment, though, it was only possible for Hannibal to recognize a puzzle laid out far away and befogged; its pieces, however, seemed to stay hidden somewhere deep in Will's mind and his past.
That was for sure, the key piece had to be something linked to his family. Mainly his father, since this seemed to have been the trigger for Will's most recent flash back.

"So what was the trigger here?", he asked, just to be sure.

"The stuff you asked me about. School, my studies...certain people...", his patient gave back, still pale and sweaty. He already was used to getting these flashbacks, but lately they hadn't been this extreme anymore. It was clearly obvious, that the doctor's questions finally had brought him closer to the edge again. And Will didn't quite know at the moment, how far he could go with that.

"Your father in particular?", Hannibal tried to dig deeper, but - as he could have known - without any effect.

"I'd rather not talk about him..."

"Fine...let's talk about your mother, then? There's barely anything you said about her in your record, how's that?", he wanted to know instead.

"Probably because I also don't like to talk about her", Will answered and sounded somehow angry.

"What do you like talking about then?", the doctor asked, in an attempt to calm Will down before he could start to lose his temper once more.

"I don't like talking, having a conversation with people...it would require me to be more sociable. I don't think I am the sociable kind of person, am I?", he got back, another one of Will's ironical statements.

"But aren't we having a conversation right now?", Hannibal asked, because, obviously, Will kept answering - in some way, even if mostly not with the information the doctor could need to create a better picture of his patient.

"You're just asking questions..."

"And you keep answering...so, what do you like talking about?", the doctor repeated with a small grin.
For a while it seemed, like Will was thinking about what to say, trying to figure something out.

"I don't know...", he finally said. "I don't like conversations, as I said...I don't understand why most people always seem to...to want to have conversations, you know? I'm not really good at it...making friends and stuff...I have my dogs, they listen, but they don't talk back..."

"So you actually need talking...but you don't like people listening to you, they could judge you, ask annoying questions, right? You rather choose talking to your dogs instead?"
He didn't get a reply on this again for quite some while, and as he did, it surprised him a bit.

"My dogs", Will started. "I put them in a shelter...the day I...", he interrupted himself then, sitting up straighter. "I need to get them back. Oh...maybe they already gave them away?! I need to go and get them!"

"Please, stay calm", Hannibal advised him, but Will didn't care.
Why didn't he think of his dogs earlier? It's been three days now, he didn't think that anyone would have got them by now - chances for that were pretty low, actually. But nevertheless he couldn't bare the thought of the only beings, he ever considered as family, being shut away in an animal shelter for anyone to just come and take them away.

"No, I need to get them out of there. They cannot take them away", he argued and started getting up, but the doctor put a hand on his shoulder and gestured him to sit back down.

"It's alright, I can take care of that for you."

"What?", Will replied, a bit unsure about the doctor's offer.

"I will call there and tell them to not give your dogs away, if this is what you would like."

"I want to see them", he gave back, still ready to get up and go to get to his dogs each second.

"I'm afraid, but I don't think this is possible for you. You're not allowed to leave here now", the psychiatrist commented, but obviously Will didn't want to listen.

"Don't tell me what's possible for me! I want to see my dogs, why can't I do that?!", he almost started screaming again, because he hated to get restricted by anyone. Why would he not be allowed to just go there and see his dogs for a while? Maybe he should promise to come back to the hospital in any case afterwards? But before he could go on with these thoughts, the doctor disrupted him once more.

"Will, listen to me. I am going to take care of it, okay? No one is taking your dogs away, alright? They'll take care of them until you'll be able to go and get them again. Is this okay for you?", Hannibal offered to his patient, feeling how much he cared for his animals. If he wasn't mistaken and remembered the record correctly, they were even the reason why Will survived his first attempt at suicide.

"If there's no other option...then yes", Will answered after a while, and to Hannibal's surprise he didn't sound angry anymore, just sad.

# Why are you here?

Chapter Notes

Hey guys :)
thanks as always for reading and leaving kudos and comments and stuff, I really apprecciate that, it's just amazing to see that you apparently really seem to like this story :) in this chapter, Will gets to know to some of the other patients, hope you enjoy it!

Will found himself standing in the dining room. Actually he didn't want to be here, obviously not, because this required him to be around people. Precisely, other patients on this station.

On the other floors of the hospital, surgery, internal medicine and what they all were called, there weren't dining rooms for the patients, because a lot of them weren't even allowed to get up and walk around.

But on the psychiatric floor, everything was a bit different, as Will should learn this day. Before, no one had expected him to have his breakfast around other patients. They had wanted to give him some time and space after he was brought there, following his attempted suicide. This morning, however, the nurse had informed him, that he would have to go to the dining room, if he wanted to eat something. Obviously Will hadn't taken these news in a pleasant way.

"And why would you make me do that?", he asked, arms crossed in front of his chest, clearly showing that he totally didn't like the thought of having his breakfast together with other people, whom he didn't even know.

"We make you do that, so that you and the others come around people. So you can have some little chat if you like and don't feel too alone. It's not good if you're sitting alone in this room the whole day. This applies to every other patient here as well. Some have experienced similar things to you, it could help you to talk to them", the nurse explained and Will listened only half-heartedly.

He didn't feel like having his breakfast in front of others, he had never liked it. Plus, he didn't even know these people. And he also didn't feel at all like getting to know to them. He just never has been a sociable person. In his current situation maybe even less so.

The nurse said, others have had similar experiences. Awesome. Did this qualify them to become best friends now? Should they found a club named "Suicide survivors"?
He just didn't understand, why he couldn't stay alone. Alone was fine for him. Alone suited him, he liked it. What he didn't like, however, was the perspective, of only getting something to eat, if he would join other people for it.

"...that's why we also have therapy groups, additionally to the therapy sessions with the psychiatrists. In these groups, you can talk to each other. Or you can just listen if you prefer that. There are other groups too, like a painting group, a gymnastics group and then you can also have your lunch and dinner together with...", he heard the nurse going on and was ripped out of his thoughts by these words.

"Did you just say you're expecting me to not only take my breakfast with other people, but also paint with them? Or do yoga with them?!", he asked, looking rather disturbed, because this thought alone made him want to puke.

"Yes! Because this supports your healing progress and maybe you'll be able to go home earlier", the nurse said, trying to sound encouraging and not annoyed of Will's defensive demeanor.

"I don't want to go, I don't feel like it", Will gave back, and sounded stubborn as ever. Even if he really wasn't, because the actual reason he didn't like to go there was, that he rather preferred to be left alone.

"Dr. Lecter meant, you would surely say that", the nurse countered, which made Will give her a confused look.

"What has Dr. Lecter got to do with that?", he wanted to know, because he couldn't see how the psychiatrist would be in charge of his breakfast.

"He knew, that you'd be reluctant to leave your room and start to be sociable", the nurse started and Will snorted, because obviously Dr. Lecter knew, since he had told him so himself.

"And to make you want to participate more in the daily life on this station, he said, he'd have a surprise for you tomorrow, if you did so"

"A surprise?", Will repeated with a facial expression that basically screamed 'what the fuck?!'.
Apart from the fact that he really didn't like surprises, he couldn't see, why the doctor would feel the need to treat him into wanting to leave his room.

"He advised me to tell you so", the nurse meant.

"But why?"

"That's all I know...so, do you feel like having breakfast now?", she said, looking at him expectantly and he hated that expression on her face.

"And what if I don't care about this surprise?", Will just gave back, because he really didn't care at all.

"Dr. Lecter said you will."

"How would he know?"

"Mr. Graham, see, I don't make the rules, I'm just telling you what he told me. But I really think, that even if you're not interested in surprises, you should go and have some breakfast. You look like you could need it", the nurse answered honestly.

And in the end, it actually was hunger that had driven him to the dining room, rather than any surprise that the psychiatrist had promised. Will didn't even care to think about what it might be, it just really didn't interest him.
His only focus for now laid on getting something into his stomach, whilst not engaging into some social situation too much. At first this really seemed to work. As he stepped into the bright room, all painted in cream and light orange, apart from some nurse, only two other patients were there so far.

There was a middle aged blonde woman, pouring herself a cup of coffee. She seemed to be nothing but skin and bones and Will wondered whether she was on this station due to an eating disorder. If she had some other disease, that had caused her to lose that much weight, she most certainly wouldn't be on the psychiatric floor.
The other patient was a plump man with curly brown hair and a beard who sat at the dining table and seemed to be crying into a handkerchief.

"Oh Franklyn, come on...do you want me to bring you a cup of coffee?", the blonde woman asked, trying to sound cheerful.

"Nooo...", the man named Franklyn cried. "I want chamomile tea. Why don't you have any today?", he sobbed and his question was directed at the nurse.

"I'm really sorry, but we run out of it. We'll have new chamomile tea this afternoon, I promise! We're getting a new food order in at noon!"

"But you know...you know I only drink chamomile tea", Franklyn sobbed and seemed to take the whole situation extremely personally.
Just as Will stepped closer to the table with the food and drinks on it, he was realized by the nurse. It was the one he had discussed with about going to see Dr. Lecter on his first day here.

"Good morning, Mr. Graham! I see you finally join us for breakfast today!"

"Morning", he mumbled, not looking at any of the attendees directly.

"He's a little reluctant", he heard the nurse say to the blonde woman, but he didn't care. Good. They should all just leave him alone, so that he could eat in peace.
But the woman didn't seem to be impressed by that, because a moment later she stood next to Will, holding a bony hand out to him.

"I'm Beth"

"Will", he only returned, without giving her a look and poured himself a cup of coffee.

"Do you want to sit with Franklyn and me?", Beth asked and Will already rolled his eyes. Couldn't she understand, that he just wanted to have his food in quiet?

"Come on, Beth, leave the guy alone", another voice behind him said and Will quietly thanked the man, because he really didn't want anything rather than to be left alone.

„Oh, Tom...morning!", Beth said, turning around to face him.

Also Will took a look over his shoulder to see who had saved him from unwanted company. Tom was a slender guy in his mid-thirties, grim looking, with hollow cheeks and due to some unexplainable reason, he trembled like a leaf. An ex junkie? Maybe.

Well, Will didn't care, as long as Beth was distracted now and he could take some toast, cheese and sausages and look for a place to take a seat.
He decided for one slightly afar from where the others were, so that none of them would get the idea to start talking to him again. And he just hoped, that maybe Tom would make Beth understand, that not everyone liked to be talked to. He didn't care about Franklyn anyway, who still was crying a little over his non-existent chamomile.
Will had almost survived his breakfast without getting disturbed by anyone again, as someone new stepped at the table, opposite of him.

"You're new here", a girl's voice said, and Will was wondering about whether he could maybe just pour the rest of his orange juice over her head, so that she would shut up.

"Do you mind if I take this seat here?", she asked, but just sitting down without waiting for an answer, whilst Will still hadn't looked up from his plate.
"So, when did you come here?", the girl went on, not caring that Will didn't pay attention to her so far. Maybe she thought, if she went on annoying him, that he'd answer her.
"Oh, by the way, my name's Abigail!", she noticed and then laughed, just a little. This made her seem far more likeable than her ongoing chatter, so Will sighed and finally looked up at her.

She didn't seem older than maybe seventeen, long brown hair, big sad looking blue eyes. There was a bandage around her left wrist.

"Why are you here?", he heard himself asking, before he could stop himself. He just didn't like the thought at all, that this girl seemed to have indeed a similar history to his own.

And he couldn't even know yet, how true he was with this assumption.

"Ah, you can talk", Abigail answered with a slight grin. "Don't you think you should at least tell me your name, before you ask me this question?"

"Sorry...I'm Will", he introduced himself.

"So, you've not being here for long, have you?", Abigail just went on, ignoring his prior question, but Will actually could understand her. He also wouldn't have answered to that question right away, if some stranger asked him.

"That's my fourth day."

"Ah, I see", the girl meant, sipping on her orange juice. For some moment, she was quiet, eating some of her scrambled eggs.

„I think you can guess from that, why I'm here", she said then, pointing at the bandage on her wrist and Will only nodded.

"Why are you here?"

"I was...", he started, unsure of what to tell her, not wanting to tell her anything, actually.

"You were?", she encouraged him to go on.

"I'm here because of Dr. Lecter", Will finally said, drinking out his last juice and getting up, because he couldn't take talking to Abigail any longer. He needed to be alone again.

# Little talks and nightmares

It was late afternoon, when it knocked on Will's door and he got distracted from nothing more but dozing off lightly, while staring out of the window into a grey-ish winter day. He guessed that it was a nurse, trying to annoy him with some other stuff again. Like persuading him, why it was necessary to go and get some lunch. But he'd successfully overheard her pleading and nagging the last time.

But when the door was opened, and he turned around to find out, who had stepped in, he was surprised to find Abigail standing there.

"Hey, Will", she said, giving him a small, encouraging smile, that was nothing but faked. He knew when he saw a faked smile, he used it himself all of the time. Actually it was surprising, how many people believed it and never dared to question it.

"Hey", he gave back, still surprised and a little confused about this visitor.
"What are you doing here?", he wanted to know then, sitting up on the bed and let his feet hover right above the floor.

"I just wondered what you were doing all day long. Since you didn't show up for lunch and neither for any of the afternoon groups", the girl said and Will was left astonished about the fact that she actually seemed to care.

Most people didn't make the effort to try and talk to him again, when they see his reluctant side, but in almost every occasion it was exactly what he wanted. Just to be left alone.

"I don't like being around people too much", he explained and felt like he had to repeat himself all the time since he got here.

"Why?...is it an anxiety disorder?", Abigail asked as if she knew what she was talking about.

"It occurs", he said shortcut, because he didn't feel like discussing his conditions with someone he just had met.

In some situations he was taken by fear, all of a sudden it flooded through his whole body like a hot wave, then leaving him all cold, trembling, unable to breath properly and with a wild beating heart. It happened sometimes, when he was in a place with too many people. When he felt caged, when there were too many new things all at once. Or when he remembered something from his past that he rather shouldn't have.

"I was fighting it too", Abigail meant, taking a seat on that same chair, where Dr. Lecter has been sitting as he talked to Will.

"You beat it?", Will asked, and it rather was a question as to how she did it, not if she did so.

"I'm on my way."

Will didn't find anything to give back here, so he was left to just observe the blue floor underneath his dangling feet. Though, he wasn't as annoyed with this girl anymore, as he was at breakfast time. She showed an honest interest in him, so maybe he should at least try to do so as well?

"You should take part in some of the groups, you know?", was the next thing Abigail said. Seemed like she didn't want to give up talking to him, even if he didn't want to make the required effort in holding up a conversation.

Her sad eyes tried to find his, but he couldn't give in to her look, it was too hard for him.

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I know that it actually can help", the girl explained and he wondered, if it was true. Then, on the other hand, if it helped Abigail, it didn't mean it would help him as well. He didn't know her story, and right now, he also didn't care to know.

"I'll think about it", Will considered, because he had no energy for this right now.

He didn't feel like doing some gymnastics with all the others. How should he, if he didn't even have enough will to attend lunch this noon? Rather he'd stayed in his room with a rumbling stomach, not able to get up. Now, he didn't want to throw Abigail out, because she seemed to be nice, but he also didn't want to go on talking.

If he only could bring up some effort, maybe he could become friendly with her. He didn't have a proper friend in years. Maybe because he never felt like all the effort was worth it. Or because not many even made an attempt to show him, that they'd like to become friends with him. For now he decided against this possibility, because he didn't find the will, nor the energy required to make an attempt at even trying to make something like a friend.

"I'm sorry, but would you mind leaving?", he asked her, as polite as he could bring up.

"I just thought that maybe you could need some company..."

"Thanks for that...I'm just not a company-loving person, you know", he meant, as she got up to leave.

"I don't suppose you'll come to dinner with us others?", Abigail asked, when at the door.

"I suppose not. If I can make the nurse bring me some food", Will answered, a faked grin on his lips, because again, he couldn't bring himself to show a real one.

"See you around, then", the girl said, before leaving.

And Will was more than glad to be left alone again. He thought he could like Abigail, if he could ever like people enough again. She seemed nice and she'd actually come to talk to him, after he had been so neglecting to her in the morning. Maybe she just felt lonely and wanted someone to talk to, someone other than the psychiatrists.
In the evening, he could persuade the nurse to bring him some dinner to his room by pointing

out, that he'd not only been sociable for breakfast, but also had talked to Abigail in the afternoon. Obviously he left out, that it was the girl who had been seeking him out.

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He was lying in bed and couldn't fall asleep, because he was afraid, once more. Not of the darkness, that other kids his age feared, no. Since he had learned what real fear looked like, he wasn't afraid of green hairy monsters underneath his bed anymore. They were just thoughts, they didn't exist for real.

That there lived indeed a monster under the very same rooftop with him, wasn't quite that obvious to him all of the time yet. Will was seven years old, only a little boy, but he already had to experience worse than most people ever would.

Also this night, he witnessed them, screaming, as always. And he was powerless about it, couldn't do anything, as always. He was seven years old, just a little boy.
His father was always drunk. When he wasn't drunk, he was asleep. That's how he could stand him the most, because at least, he wasn't screaming then. Always complaining, always baiting and bashing. First verbally, then pounding.

He was like a volcano. You never dared to say a word, it could be the trigger for him to explode. It could be the last thing you said, before he smashed you to the ground. The least he ever got away with, were some slaps in the face and that already was enough to make his cheeks swell a little.

His mother would never let him go to school like this. With bruises, a black eye or cuts. But sometimes they had to seek out a doctor, then his mother told him, that he'd fallen from a tree, or had a fight with some bigger kid.

Will didn't understand, why his mother never said the truth and told him not to do so either. But he thought, that maybe his father could find out in the end and make it even worse. He thought, his mother was as afraid as he was himself. Everyone who ever had witnessed his father drunk, would affirm that.

Now they were screaming again. If it only was them yelling the worst things at each other, it wasn't even that bad. That's what it was always like, when his father was awake. Will couldn't remember having any other memories of him, than being angry and enraged about something. He couldn't even understand, how someone could always be like that, but he guessed it came from the alcohol, even if he didn't comprehend, how this could be the case. Wasn't it just some beverage?

He couldn't hear their exact words, because he had his head pressed in his pillow. But he could feel his mother's fear, his father's rage.
It was always like that. He didn't know what it was, that made his father furious as he got, but when he slapped him, he could feel all the fury his father laid in the punch. Sometimes, when he looked at him, Will felt anger, wrath. Sometimes it was his own, being beyond angry for the things his father did. But sometimes, he could feel so much more and he couldn't even coordinate all these feelings that seemed to crush him.

When he looked at his mother, however, he felt mostly fear. Desperation. It were the feelings he shared as well. Then, his mother also felt dependent and that's what he didn't understand.

Sometimes he thought, if he only was older, stronger, he could oppose his father. He wouldn't be so powerless. Then he could act on the rage he felt inside of him. He could fight back.

But he couldn't. He was only a little boy, left to punch the wall next to his bed. Long ago had he given up on crying in his pillow. He'd learned that crying didn't help him. In the end, no one helped him.

His mother intervenes, when his father dares to lay a hand on him again. At least, as long as she doesn't get punched down as well. Most of the time then, they both end up being knocked to the floor, until a sudden realization strucks his father.

And then he lets go and leaves them be. Only to drink more and more, until he passes out, to wake up completely hung over and start drinking again. It went on and on and on like this. There didn't seem to be an end, not yet...

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Sweating and panting for air, Will woke from another well-known dream involving his oh so well protected childhood. Clenching his fists in bitterness he punched the mattress, since the next wall was too far away to reach. He guessed that he probably could never leave this pattern anymore, but he didn't care, as long as he could calm down in some way.

When the trembling had stopped and he could breath again, he got up to peel off his sweat-soaked t-shirt. But mostly he did so in order to make himself realize that he wasn't in his dream anymore. He wasn't this helpless, frightened little boy anymore. He was twenty-eight years old and hadn't seen any of his parents in years.

Nevertheless those memories kept haunting him, sometimes more, sometimes less. This night it had been a tough one again, but not the worst he thought to remember. Anyways he laid wide awake for the next few hours, waiting for the pitch black night sky to turn into pale grey, announcing the next morning.

# Lunch

Chapter Notes

> Hey guys!
> thanks a lot for all the attention this story is getting, I'm really happy about it :) I hope you also enjoy this chapter and as always, feel free to tell me, if you find anything about it irritating or something, I wanna try and make it best for you :)

When the nurse came in to check on him the next morning, Will was asleep. Fatigue had worn him out in the end, even if he had desperately tried to stay awake in order to avoid further nightmares. At least that was made up to him, since the rest of the night his sleep was dreamless. Nevertheless, when he heard the door and the nurse, who carefully tried to not startle him, he sat straight in bed in an instant and glared at her, as if she'd just personally insulted him.

"Good morning, Mr. Graham", she tried to sound cheerfully and smiled at him, but he still kept on glaring at her.

He felt miserable. Even if he didn't have another dream that night, the first one still lingered in his mind and he seemingly couldn't just get rid of it that easily. He knew these dreams, these memories all too well, since he had re-lived them frequently. Still it was tough on him every single time.

"How are you feeling today?", the nurse asked him, checking his pulse for some reason he wasn't aware of.
Maybe he looked as if he'd had a panic attack, which basically was accurate.

"As always", Will just gave back, making a statement without really giving anything away.

"You had a rough night?", she went on, and he hated her for digging deeper. He didn't intend to tell her anything.

"Guess so."

"Well, I think, maybe a nice breakfast could help you here!", the nurse suggested then and the urge to punch her increased dramatically.

"I'm not hungry", he just gave back, falling into his pillows again.

"Mr. Graham, you already didn't have any lunch yesterday, you have to eat something!" Oh, how he wished that she'd just shut up. His head was revolting and throbbing and he couldn't stand talking to her.

"No, I don't. I had dinner last night", Will answered, his back turned to her, just wanting her to go away and leave him alone.
"Maybe you'll change your mind. Then you can always come and get something. But only until 9am, you know that!", the nurse explained to him and he didn't even listen properly anymore, because obviously he knew that.

"However, if you don't want to leave your room for breakfast, you need to see Dr. Lecter in the afternoon. He told me that your next session is set for 2pm and he awaits you in his office."

"Yeah, I'll see if I wanna go."

"No, that's not up for debate! You have to go", she gave back insistently.

"You cannot make me", he just said, anger clearly laid in his voice and he pressed a hand to his forehead, trying to keep calm and breath.

"Dr. Lecter could always come to your room, however, he'd appreciate if you just did it like the other patients and attended office hours. So you see, you cannot really avoid seeing him," the nurse meant. As he just didn't give back any reply, she pointed out once more, how important it was that he got some breakfast and that he could always just come around to get some, then she eventually left the room.

Will really wasn't hungry at all. Those memories from his childhood were like a heavy stone in his stomach, even now, after years and years that he hadn't heard a word of his father. He wasn't even sure about his whereabouts. The last thing he got before he took off to college all these years ago, was that his father finally had been accused and would be put behind bars. Finally justice had been served. If it was up to Will, he could stay in jail, rotting. But he only got a couple of years, since nothing could be held against him concerning the disappearance of Will's mother...

By noon, Will still hadn't gotten out of bed, rather he'd dozed away again, getting the rest he couldn't find during night times. So, when he finally opened his eyes again, sleepy and in no better mood than hours before, he realized that it was 1pm and he'd missed lunch. As by now his stomach was grumbling, he gulped down some water directly from the bottle on the nightstand, before he stumbled out of bed and into the bathroom.

After he'd taken a shower and felt a little more alive, he stepped out into the hospital room again, just wondering whether he could persuade one of the nurses to bring him some lunch, only to find a by now well-known figure, neatly dressed as always, sitting in one of the chairs, waiting for him.

"Dr. Lecter", he said, obviously surprised to find the psychiatrist here. Hadn't the nurse said, that he wanted Will to come to his office this time?

"Hello, Will", the doctor replied, a light smile spreading on his face, that Will didn't return, still he was taken aback by his visitor, since he didn't expect him to show up again here.

"I figured you might be hungry", he continued then, pointing to the plastic containers and cutlery he'd put on the small table, he had taken place at.

"The nurses let me know, that you don't take dinnertimes too seriously. Well, or attending those meals", there was an amused, but also dispraising undertone in his voice.

"So, you brought me lunch?", Will asked, stepping closer and taking the other seat, while sounding rather hopeful, because he wasn't sure whether the nurses appreciated to have to bring him his portion every day, if he actually was supposed to eat together with the other patients.

"Yes. It's leftovers from the dinner I cooked last night and I actually brought them for myself, because I prefer knowing what I put into my body. Being quite honest, everyone thinks that hospital food isn't the best, right?", the doctor explained to him and for the first time, Will found him somehow likeable.

Not only did he cook the food himself, but also was he willing to give away his lunch to Will, because he knew that he had struggled to leave his room and engage in a social situation.

"Is it okay that I just...I mean it's your lunch", Will said, looking at the boxes in front of him hesitantly.

"Please, I insist that you have it!", Dr. Lecter meant, naturally, reaching over to open the containers and exposed the steaming potatoes, roast pork and vegetables, It looked delicious.

"I used the microwave they have in the dinner room", he explained at Will's questioning look, his tone clearly gave away, that he actually wasn't too fond of having to use a microwave.

"Thank you", Will gave back, giving the psychiatrist a short, appreciating look, before finally getting something into his stomach. "That's really good", he commented after some bites.

"You're welcome.", the doctor just said, once more with that slight smile on his face.

"So...you're always cooking for yourself?", Will wanted to know after some quiet moments, because he was really interested. Himself, he could make some pancakes or spaghetti, but that was it.

"It's one of my passions, yes. As I said, I take care of what I put into my body and I don't really appreciate to support factory farming and such things", Hannibal explained.

He detested the idea of animals being pent-up in small spaces, being tortured and fattened in a way too short time. The same went for non-organic food. It just made him feel better to know that he didn't eat any chemical substances with his vegetables or fruits. And he'd always been interested in cooking, for him, it wasn't only preparing a meal, it was an art. There were so many ways to work on the ingredients and he loved to find out even more. It was just a pity, that apart from his dinner parties, that his colleagues and friends adored, he always just could make dinner for himself. So that's why most of the days, he brought leftovers for lunch in order to avoid the cheap canteen food.

Will wondered what Dr. Lecter's other passions were and came to the conclusion, that a dapper gentleman like this doctor, would probably love such things as fine arts, classical music, but he didn't dare to ask. Also he wasn't sure, why he even was thinking about that. Anyways, even if he hated to, he had to admit, that he found the man more interesting than he'd expected to. Otherwise he wouldn't want to ask questions.

"Why didn't you want to eat with the others?", the doctor asked, as Will was almost done with lunch.

"What do you suppose?", Will gave back, grimacing a little, because he knew that the doctor knew his answer already.

"You don't feel sociable enough to betake into a room full of strangers and be comfortable enough there to have a meal", Dr. Lecter expressed, what Will also would have answered, just probably not with the same choice of words.

"Why do you ask, when you know my answer anyway?"

"I wanted to hear it come from your mouth", the psychiatrist gave back and Will just nodded. Also Hannibal's intention was, trying to make Will talk about rather harmless topics, so that he could build some trust, before they went on to more dangerous territories, namely Will's childhood traumata.

"You felt comfortable enough, however, to take your lunch in front of me", he remarked a moment later, sounding a little amused.

"You brought it to me", Will said, as if that explained everything and for him it did.

"Yesterday you had breakfast with the others", it wasn't a question, but a simple statement, so Will didn't know whether he was required to answer to that. In the end he did.

"I was hungry."

"Did you get to know to the other patients?"

"More or less", was his shortcut answer.

"You seemed to get along with Abigail Hobbs rather well." Another one of those statements.

"She talked to me. I didn't want to talk to her", Will said.

"Why not?"

"I wasn't interested enough and felt tired and worn out. I always feel like that", he gave back, sounding somehow desperate.

"I will prescribe you medication for that. It will help you to feel fitter and more motivated", the doctor said, trying to sound encouraging.

"I don't want some new medication. I already had enough of that stuff", Will protested, because he didn't understand why this medication would help him, if a dozen others hadn't.

"Will you at least try it, if I promise you, that you can dispose it again, if it isn't of any use?", the doctor asked and for a moment Will felt like he was being talked to as if he was a kid, which made him remember something else.

"I was told, you already promised me a 'surprise' in case I went to breakfast yesterday", he meant, light sarcasm in his voice.

To his astonishment, a smile spread on the doctor's face. "Ah, yes. That's what I also planned to tell you during our chat. And I'm quite sure you'll like it."

"So...what is it, then?", Will wanted to know, not as annoyed as he was before. Actually he was curious about it, he couldn't even deny that.

"Will you try the medicine?", the other man asked and Will could see the spark of amusement in the light brown eyes, as he shortly caught his view. The doctor was clearly enjoying making a little game out of this, so why not playing along?

"Are you trying to bribe me, Dr. Lecter?", Will asked, intending to sound seriously, but couldn't quite hide an amused undertone. He clearly started to find this doctor here, for once, pretty likeable, even if he had intended not to.

"Believe me, it will be worth it", Dr. Lecter meant, clearly convinced of whatever it was that he wanted to surprise Will with.

"Oh, I do hope that!"

# Trip back home

Chapter Notes

Hey there, guys :)
thanks to each and everyone reading this story, giving kudos or writing comments, I'm thrilled by your interest and support! I hope you also do enjoy this chapter here:)

Will felt like a bird being released out of its cage and finally being able to properly spread its wings, when he stepped out of the hospital into the cool, but sunny winter day. He didn't go outside in a week and it was nice to feel the cold air on his face, being able to walk around, even if just to the parking lot. Dr. Lecter was at his side, pointing out a grey-ish Bentley as his own.

"So, you're just gonna kidnap me, or what?", Will said, jokingly, this time without his typical sarcastic undertone.

Obviously this didn't go unnoticed by Hannibal, who was glad that his plan seemed to work out so far. Will appeared to be almost relaxed, for the first time since he'd met him. Of course he was far from being cured, they probably hadn't even really quite started that process yet, and he also shouldn't wander around here, but he wasn't alone.
As long as the doctor was with him, he should be alright. It already seemed like half a wonder to him that Will actually had agreed to leave with him, although Hannibal hadn't even quite told him, where they were heading. But he guessed, that Will just needed to get out of the hospital for a while.

"If you want to call it like that", Hannibal replied slightly amused, as he started the engine. "I prefer saying that I take you on a trip. May I ask you to explain me the directions to your home?"

"You're taking me home?", Will replied, surprise in his voice.

But also a hint of nervousness and disappointment. He wasn't quite sure what to think of that. Why did Dr. Lecter want to bring him home? Was this a way to find a new approach to talk about his parents? Also he'd find himself hoping, just a little, that the doctor would bring him to the shelter, so that he could see his dogs...

"I let my colleagues know, that I would take you out under my supervision to collect some personal items from your apartment. Since you said, you don't have anyone who could visit you and bring you those things. I realized you'd only always be wearing the clothes the hospital provided, or what you had on your body when you got there", the doctor explained and took his gaze off the road for a moment, to let it wander over to Will, giving him a polite smile.

As a matter of fact, Will was wearing a dark brown coat over his t-shirt that the doctor had lent him and that was too big for him, because he hadn't had any jacket with him the day the psychiatrist had hospitalized him. And he really appreciated that Dr. Lecter had thought of this, because he got tired of the hospital clothes and just wanted to have some sweatpants and t-shirts.

"Thanks…that was mindful of you", Will answered, but still not so sure, whether the doctor might not have any deeper intentions by bringing him home.

After a short ride, Dr. Lecter stopped the car in front of a four-story apartment house, Will had navigated them to. This part of town did neither look too run-down, but nor quite middle-class either. When getting out of the car, Will noticed the Christmas decoration everywhere for the first time and had to ask the doctor for the calendar date. It was less than a week before Christmas.

"You're not from here, are you?", the psychiatrist asked, when they went upstairs to the second floor, where Will opened the door to his flat and let the other step in first.

"No, I grew up in Louisiana. I first came here for college and lived in the dorms...after I dropped out, I was lucky to get this flat", Will told, hinting the doctor to take a seat on the couch in his small living room.

"I'm just gonna pick up some things then", he added and crossed the corridor to disappear in his bedroom and to collect some things in a backpack.

Meanwhile, Hannibal had stood up again from the way too tiny green-ish couch to wander around in the room, taking in his surroundings. There was a coffee table, a tube TV, a bookcase also filled with some CDs and DVDs. He let his view roam over the titles, some classical ones, not only in the book, also the CD section. Added by some rock records, Sci-Fi movies and documentaries.

Far more interesting than this were the pictures on the walls and the dresser. There were photographs of landscapes, a lake lined with trees, which were reflected on its surface; a group of deer on a meadow; two dogs, obviously mutts, romping around in the woods. On the dresser, there lay some charcoal drawings of flowers; another picture of the dogs, this time with Will in it, but also a couple of fly-fishing lures, that looked self-made.

Hannibal had just extended a hand to examine one of them, as Will came out of his bedroom, wearing new jeans and some plaid shirt, a backpack hung over one shoulder and the doctor's coat looped over the other arm.

"You're a fly-fisher?", the doctor wanted to know, eyeing the lure carefully.

"Yeah, I go fishing every now and then", Will acknowledged, wondering for an instant, what the psychiatrist might probably figure from his interior.

"These drawings are stunning", Dr. Lecter commented next, nodding to the charcoal flowers.

"Thanks", the hint of a smile spooked on Will's lips. "I haven't drawn anything in a while, though", he added, some regret in his voice.

"Why not?"

"Didn't feel like it. Barely went outside lately...only for short walks with the dogs", he explained, shrugging, and taking a seat on the arm rest of the couch.

"How do you make a living? What did you do after you dropped out of college?", the other man went on asking and Will wasn't quite sure once again, if he did so just out of interest, or with the hidden agenda to make him talk in the end.

"Gotta thank my neighbor for it. Jack...he's a car mechanic. That's the only thing I've ever learned from my father, I guess", he snorted shortly, before going on. "First I scratched a living by working in a diner, but that wasn't for me...So, Jack knew I needed work and he was looking for people. That's how I got a job, that I kinda liked at least and that I did until around a year ago..."

"Until you tried to take your life for the first time?", the doctor assumed, still standing near the dresser and Will only nodded.

"Jack found me, when the dogs went nuts."

"Where's he now?"

"In California, with his wife...she's suffering from cancer and they're doing some fancy therapy there...he had to sell the repair shop to afford it", Will explained.

"So, then you're living from unemployment-pay now?", the psychiatrist wanted to know.

"Also because my mental condition didn't allow me to keep on working...", he mumbled sheepishly.

"What do you want to do?", Dr. Lecter said.

"Excuse me?"

"What kind of profession do you want to pursue, when therapy starts working and you're allowed to leave the hospital?", he specified.

"Uhm...well, I guess...I don't know", Will stammered, because he indeed was rather clueless.

Well, actually there were some things he could imagine. But he didn't dare to think of this just yet, because it seemed so far away. In order to work, he first had the get out of the hospital and therefore, he had to get mentally stable again. From a state of mental stability, however, he felt light years away at the moment. Even if for once - thanks to the doctor being so subtle and trustworthy, and never making Will anything do, that he absolutely couldn't or didn't want to - he didn't feel all that awkward around him and actually could manage to keep up a conversation somehow.

"How did you know that you wanted to become a doctor?", Will asked then, before Dr. Lecter could pre-empt him. He really wanted to know. Also this was rather new and rare. Will barely could or liked keeping up a chat by asking questions of his own.

Hannibal sighed a little and walked over to the armchair, not because he needed to rest his legs, but rather because he wanted to buy some time before answering. He usually didn't like talking about this topic, but he felt, like he should tell Will this story in order to gain a little more of his trust. Also because he sensed, that Will seemed actually in a pretty good and talkative condition right now, so he wanted to keep it going. He sat down, crossed his legs and looked over to his patient, who was still leaning on the arm rest.

"I already told you, that I had to live with my uncle, because my family died. I was just a boy, when it happened. We had a car accident on icy road...", he finally started and found it, as always, tough to speak about it, even after more than thirty years.

"The car crashed into a tree, my parents were both dead instantly. Broken necks...It was a wonder, that I survived with pretty little injury. Some cuts, a light whiplash, a broken rip...", he stopped again, seemingly gathering his thoughts, but actually arranging his feelings.

"My younger sister, however...she had a major laceration in her chest due to a huge chip of the front shield. I tried everything I could to save her...to somehow stop the bleeding, but...I couldn't help her. My parents were dead in the front seats and I witnessed my little sister bleeding out...so, later I decided, I wanted to become a doctor in order to be able to help people...", Hannibal finished, clearing his throat.

Will swore he could see the doctor's eyes getting somewhat teary, while telling about this tragic accident and he quickly averted his gaze, swallowing hard, while he clearly could feel the pain these memories were still causing the other man.

"I'm sorry...I shouldn't have asked you that", he said, apologetically.

"It's fine, you couldn't know", the doctor said and he meant it, reassuring Will by smiling slightly. It was a sad smile, however.

"You loved your family", Will stated, feeling sick in the guts. It just really didn't occur fair to him, that he was stuck with a mother who seemed to be too weak to fight for him and a father who really wasn't more than his creator, whilst Dr. Lecter just lost his family, he seemed to care a lot about. But then, when was something ever fair?

"Yes, very much. I adored my mother, my father was my idol and I would have protected my sister with my life, but I couldn't...", the doctor answered, then adding, only out of curiosity "Do you have any siblings, Will?"

"None of which I know, at least...I wouldn't put it past my father to have some bastards wandering around, though."

Will's bitter tone was back and Hannibal already was assuming, that his patient would start to block things out again, not wanting to go on talking. But he really couldn't need him to do so again, he had intended to make him trust him and not putting him at the edge once more. Not

for now, at least. So he changed the topic, back to lighter fields, seemingly puzzling Will by doing so.

"A photographer?", Will asked back at the question whether he had considered this as a job. But not because he couldn't ever imagine this, actually he could so very well, but he just was astonished by the change of topics. Actually he'd almost expected Dr. Lecter to dig deeper into his relationship with his parents, so he was more than just surprised that he didn't. But also he appreciated it a lot, because he really wasn't ready now to talk about this. Maybe the doctor was clearly aware of that.

"Yes, is this so absurd?", Dr. Lecter wanted to know, laughing a bit about Will's reaction.

"No...no, not at all", Will replied, kind of amused as well. "Actually I really would love to do that."

"I was just figuring, since these photographs are really extraordinary."

"Yeah, thanks...", Will answered, once more quite sheepishly.

"You should keep this in mind, you know. When you're back in the hospital, working to get healthy, to feel better, then you should keep in mind all the things that you enjoy, that make you feel good. You will need it, because it's a long way to go", the doctor reminded him, but it sounded encouraging nevertheless.

"I'm gonna try", he said and Dr. Lecter looked at him, as if he wanted to say 'I know you will'. He didn't, though, but anyway Will had the feeling, like finally something changed inside of his mind. For the first time in what felt like an eternity, there was a little light inside of all the darkness. It was tiny, just a spark, but even from the tiniest of sparks there could grow a flame, given there was an accelerant. He just had to find and hold on to it...

"Did I mention, that this was just the first stop on our trip?", Will was then disrupted from thinking about this new feeling inside of him and looked up curiously.

"What do you mean?"

"You'll see", the doctor replied, once more with his typical slight smile.

# Walking the dogs

Chapter Notes

> As always, thanks a lot for reading and the comments! I hope you guys are okay with the fact, that in this story Will "only" has two dogs and not his whole pack like in the series ;)

The next stop was at the animal shelter, where Will had brought his dogs to. When he got off the car, he felt like he hadn't felt in ages: excited. Happy. Also kind of grateful that Dr. Lecter had indeed found a way to let him see his beloved pets.

His dogs were all he'd got left, the only real family he ever had. They were always there for him, always listened, without asking annoying questions, without judging, or treating him weird for being a little awkward. On the contrary, no matter what he did or said, they always loved him unconditionally.

Passing by the boxes, guided by a woman, who worked there, seeing all the dogs of the most different breeds and sizes, made him feel incredibly regretful and also angry at himself. How could he possible bring his dogs here?

"Here we are", the woman finally said, stopping in front of one of the boxes and opening it.

Inside were two mongrels, a mid-sized one, of that typically ash blond color and a smaller brown speckled terrier mutt. As soon as they recognized Will, they run up to him, jumping, tail wagging and yapping joyfully, whilst Will kneeled down to pat and embrace them, getting all licked over the face by doing so.

"Hey, hey there buddies...", he said, obvious joy in his voice. "Yeah, I'm also happy to see you, boys...I've missed you...yes, yes you too, Winston" Some more patting and cuddling followed.

Hannibal observed the scene from outside the box and a smile crept on his face. It was almost adorable how Will acted around his dogs. There was not much of the darkness that surrounded him, or his awkwardness, but rather he reminded the doctor of a boy, all carefree and sound. Will was smiling for the first time since Hannibal had met him and he could see it was an honest smile, there was a glint in his eyes and true happiness, love in his voice, when talking to the animals.

Seeing Will like this re-affirmed Hannibal that it was worth trying to help him. Too many people already had given up on him that was for sure, he could tell it. He didn't want to be the next to let him down. Not when there was hope. And Hannibal had the impression, that their little tour could give Will some new. He desperately could need it, there certainly was an

emotional struggle coming up for him, since Hannibal had also learned some things from this trip so far. For example he'd figured out some new approaches to probably make it easier for both of them to dig into Will's childhood trauma. But he'd talk about that to Will in their next session, not today. Today was about building trust, giving Will hope. So far it seemed to work out.

"Can I go for a walk with them?", Will asked the woman, but his look was rather directed at the doctor.

"Yes, but no longer than an hour, that are the rules", she answered.

"Of course, but I'll have to accompany you", the psychiatrist pointed out and Will rolled his eyes a little. Obviously. But he didn't care too much about the doctor coming along for a walk, as long as he could only spent some more time with his dogs. Also, without Dr. Lecter, he wouldn't even be here, so he should be able to bear having him by his side, while taking the dogs out.

They were taking their walk in a park close to the shelter, Will had removed the leashes so that Winston and Wesley could run free, because they hated to be on leashes. Besides they obeyed to his every word, so he didn't have to fear that they'd run away or attack random people.

"Do you like dogs as well, doctor?", Will dared to ask Dr. Lecter after some quiet minutes, while they were strolling along side by side. He'd noticed the doctor bending down to pat Winston earlier.

"Yes, indeed. When I was living with my uncle, who owned two hounds, I used to walk and play with them", Hannibal answered, involuntarily smiling at this memory. He actually had quite missed the dogs, when his uncle sent him to France to attend the boarding school.

"And now? Do you own any animals?", Will went on, but when realizing what he just said, turning somehow abashed. He kept his gaze directed to some point far ahead of them, but couldn't stop from flushing lightly and feel awkward. Now he was talking about pets to his psychiatrist...

Obviously his reaction didn't go unnoticed by Hannibal, who against Will's assumption, wasn't annoyed, or simply amused about this topic. Rather he was glad to have Will at a point, where he was willing and comfortable enough to actually engage in a conversation and, of course, he had to encourage him to go on with it. Also he didn't mind talking about seemingly trivial things with Will, if they could talk about pets and other random subjects, then maybe it would soon be easier for his patient to talk about the things that really troubled him as well.

"You may ask me whatever you want, without having to feel conflicted or ashamed, Will. It's up to me then, whether I can and will give you an answer, or not. But I don't want you to feel bad about asking me anything, alright?", he offered him and Will lifted his view, that had wandered to the ground, to look at him shortly. Hannibal caught a glimpse of astonishment, before the other averted his gaze again.

"I feel like I have to constantly thank you...", Will replied then and Hannibal didn't quite comprehend at first.

"What do you mean?" It took Will some moments to answer his question, but Hannibal let him take this time, as always.

"You...want to really listen to me, unless some others... You make it acceptable for me to lead a conversation, because you know how much I dislike them...you found a way for me to leave the hospital and you brought me here so I can see my dogs...", Will listed, sounding a bit astonished, but there was also gratefulness.

"You saved my life...", he added quietly, gaze directed to the rocky ground again, but then looking up to meet Hannibal's eyes shortly.

"Thank you, for all that." There was a sincere smile on his lips, this time clearly for Hannibal, not as before directed to the dogs and the doctor could only mirror it, nodding lightly in understanding.

"You're welcome. I'm just doing my job", he answered, sounding modest as always. But actually Hannibal was aware of the fact, that he did a bit more than his job when it came to Will. That also didn't go unquestioned.

"So, you're casually taking patients out on a trip if they're missing their pets?", Will had already asked skeptically, before Hannibal could go on with his thoughts.

"No, I don't", he admitted. "But I do everything possible to make every session comfortable for each patient. Some will be more willed or inspired to talk to me, if I let their favorite music play on the CD-player, or if I can offer them a cup of their preferred tea."

He knew very well, that at first it was always tough for a patient to confide in their psychiatrist, and talking about their mental conditions could be frightening, so at least he wanted to be able to provide a nice and relaxing environment.

"Why do you do this for me?", Will asked on and made Hannibal look for the proper choice of words for a moment.

The doctor had already wondered about this himself, because obviously he had noticed that maybe it wasn't always right to talk to Will like he did in some situations. To let him ask too many personal questions. He didn't want to lead him on a friendly way, he couldn't. Obviously he was aware, that Will was lonely and could need a friend, but Hannibal couldn't be that friend. He was his psychiatrist and if he really wanted to help him, he couldn't become his friend.

"I guess I feel responsible for you in some way, because I was there to stop you from jumping", he finally answered after a while. This was the conclusion he had found in the end. That he somehow felt especially fond of this patient, because he literally had saved his life by his practical actions and not just, as usually, by listening to him and prescribing medications.

"I understand", Will said. "So...you didn't answer my question concerning pets", he added with a slight grin, because of this change of topics.
He really was interested to know, now that he had found out why Dr. Lecter was being so good to him. And he grew more and more into not only accepting this psychiatrist, in contrast to the others he already had to see, but he also thought that he could even like him, given some more time. He seemed to be an honest and modest person, who truly cared for his well-being and wanted to help him.

The doctor laughed briefly about Will changing back to the pet topic, then giving his answer.

"I don't have any pets, no. It's a pity, because I really like dogs. But as I work a lot, it's just not possible. At least not without the dog feeling neglected in the end and I wouldn't want that."

Will liked that answer, because he didn't understand these people at all, who'd get a dog and keep it locked up in their apartment the whole day, while they weren't even at home.

"Can we come back for the dogs? I mean...would it be okay for you to bring me back here some time, while I still have to stay at the hospital?", he wanted to know then, as they turned around to bring the dogs back to the shelter. He already disliked the thought of having to say goodbye to them and at least wanted to know if there was any possibility to come back soon.

"It depends on the progress you make", Dr. Lecter answered shortly.

"You're offering me a treat", Will commented, what he already had guessed.

"Yes. But I figure this is something we can start working with, don't you think so?"

"I guess so."

On the way back to the hospital, Will had grown more and more quiet. He wanted to see Winston and Wesley again as soon as possible, because he already missed them. At best, he didn't want to go back to the psychiatric station, but home instead; but he knew very well, that it wasn't possible for him. Yet.

This whole trip had made some things clear to him. Maybe he wasn't that lost yet. Maybe he finally found someone, who believed his whole story. Maybe Dr. Lecter could actually help him, make him feel better, make him healthy again. And then he'd be able to get his dogs and live in his flat. He could go fishing and drawing. He could actually take on the doctor's suggestion and become a photographer. Or something else. He could be anything. If he only wasn't ill anymore.

"Will?", he heard the doctor's voice cutting through his thoughts and tore himself back to the here and now.

"What?", he asked a little bewildered at first, noticing that it had grown dark outside and the car was standing in a parking lot.

"We're at the hospital", the doctor informed him.

Then Will got off the car, taking his backpack and Dr. Lecter walked him inside, making sure he made it to his room. Obviously Will hadn't intended to just run away, so he could as well have gone inside the hospital on his own, but rather than being annoyed by the doctor, he actually appreciated his company by now.

"Thanks, again", Will meant as they were walking down the isle on the third floor where his room was.

"You're welcome, again", Hannibal repeated, as they were standing in front of the door, giving Will a small smile and observing another little change in his patient.

Will didn't only manage to keep a conversation going, without feeling too uncomfortable, at least Hannibal guessed so from his behavior, but also did Will try to make some eye contact every now and then. Also now he lifted his gaze, looking at the doctor for a moment, replying his smile and Hannibal hoped, that Will would see this progress, even if it was just the tiniest step on the long road of recovery.

"I see you Monday morning", Hannibal then cut through the silence that had turned a little awkward, while he was eyeing up Will, who had averted his gaze again. He only got a nod as reply.

"Good evening, Will", he said with a polite smile.

"Good evening, Dr. Lecter", Will replied, before finally retrieving to his room.

# Drawing

On the weekends there weren't any therapy sessions. Dr. Lecter and Dr. du Maurier who were the responsible psychiatrists, for currently eleven patients on this station needing inpatient treatment, were only on call in case of emergencies. However, there were group activities on Saturdays and Sundays also for people on other stations, so one could choose between yoga, gymnastics, a painting therapy, swimming and some other things that usually didn't really interest Will.

Anyway, he didn't even feel too miserable, when the nurse brought him his new medication and so he affirmed her question on whether he'd take his breakfast with the others. It really seemed like taking him to see his dogs was the best idea Dr. Lecter could have had, because Will had realized how much he missed them and how badly he wanted for them to get out of the shelter and back home with him.

He knew, that it wouldn't be easy and that it would probably take him some while until he would be allowed to leave inpatient therapy, considering that he had repeatedly tried to take his own life, but at the moment, this possibility seemed as far out of his mind as it could be. There was another thought, though: he wanted to see Winston and Wesley again, as soon as the doctor would allow him to and Will knew that he had to get out of his "comfort" zone for that, that actually wasn't even comfortable, but rather a protective barrier he had built in order to not turn completely crazy.

So, Will took his medicine, without complaining and then made his way into the bathroom. After a shower, finally dressed in one of his own sweatpants and a plain t-shirt, he gave himself a little prep talk that he could manage the breakfast situation and then left his room.

"Morning, Will!", he was greeted by Abigail and Beth as he entered the dining room and he managed to return it without sounding hostile. The two women just were loading food onto their plates, while Franklyn poured himself a tea. Obviously chamomile.

"Oh, hey there", he said, as he noticed Will. "I don't think I've seen you around here before, have I?"

"You were too busy with your tea, I guess", Beth commented with a grin and patted Franklyn's shoulder, before Will could even open his mouth. As Franklyn then engaged in a complaint that he didn't just drink any sort of tea, Abigail asked Will, whether he'd like to sit with her and because he didn't want to get involved in any tiff, he agreed.

"Haven't felt so great yesterday?", Abigail wanted to know, when they'd sat down, starting their breakfast. Today she didn't have a bandage on her wrist anymore, just a patch.

"It wasn't too bad then...at least not after noon", Will meant, taking a sip of his coffee. "How're you doing?", he asked then, because he really didn't want to talk about his feelings with Abigail, even if she seemed to care about his well-being.

"I'm okay, I guess...my grandparents will come to visit tomorrow. They're staying in town over the holidays, so they'll be here for Christmas as well", the girl explained, then eating some fruit yoghurt.

"What about your parents?", Will asked, curiously, because it seemed a little odd to him, that only her grandparents would come to visit. But then he noticed Abigail's expression change and knew he maybe shouldn't have asked that question. He also wouldn't like to talk about his parents, so they had that thing in common.

"I'm...here because of them", is all that Abigail offered to answer, before taking a sip of her cocoa and switching topics. "So...do you think you would like any of the group activities here?"

"I won't do yoga, that's for sure", Will replied with a slight smile, that Abigail returned.

"What did you do last afternoon?", she asked then. "You seem in a way better mood now."

"I visited my dogs", Will answered. "I put them in a shelter...Dr. Lecter let me see them."

"Well, seems like this was a good thing to do! I got a dog as well...she's staying with my grandparents", Abigail told him.

"Really, that's nice! You gotta miss her, though, don't you? At least I do miss Winston and Wesley."

"Yeah, I do...but I can show you a picture of Dana later, if you like", she said and Will got a little upset at himself, because he didn't think of bringing a pic of his dogs from his flat the other day.

"For how long have you been here?", Will wanted to know then.

"About a month...they said last week that I could be out real soon, but then I...well...I somehow didn't make it through", Abigail said, looking down at her wrist with the band aid on.

"I'm sorry", Will muttered.

"No, don't be. I should be able to fight it, before they let me go. But what happened isn't so easy to process..."

"Yeah, I know...", he said in understanding.

"Do you like painting?", Abigail asked then, in an attempt to lighten the mood again.

"I like drawing."

"That's okay as well. So, you think you can join me later for that group?"

There were a couple of patients, who had gathered in one of the habitable rooms for some painting and drawing. Some even did some handicraft work with scissors and sugar paper. Except for Abigail, Will didn't know any of them. There were two teens who'd come there from pediatrics, they played some game and giggled. Will wondered, why they weren't with the other kids, but maybe they just got bored and wanted to go exploring.

Then there were three middle aged women, gossiping more than doing anything else. They had some water colors and paint brushes lying on the table in front of them. Besides there was also a mother with a little boy who didn't seem older than four years. The boy was painting a sun and some trees on a meadow, while the woman was talking to a nurse, who also was present.

"You come here a lot?", Will asked, as they chose a place near the windows and took some papers and pencils. Light flooded into the bright painted room and there were some plants and flowers standing around in the attempt to create a comfortable atmosphere.

"When I get bored of watching TV and Marissa doesn't have time to talk, then I come here, yeah", Abigail meant, getting herself a set of water colors.

"Who's Marissa?"

"My best friend. She's in Chicago for college", she explained, starting to put blue color on the sheet of paper. "I wish she could come around...maybe for the holidays, when she comes home to visit her family..."

"Hmm...", Will only murmured while trying to do a quick pencil sketch of Winston that he could work on then.

"You never have visitors here, have you?", Abigail asked after a while. She was painting something that looked like a lake.

"I don't have anyone who'd wanna visit me", Will replied, focused on the sketch.

"There gotta be someone?", the girl said, looking up from her paper, but Will didn't return her gaze.

"My dogs are my only family. They're in a shelter...my former boss and neighbor, who was like a friend and uncle...he's got a sick wife and they're in California. So no...there's no one", Will explained, view still directed on the pencil outline of Winston's head.

"What about your mom and dad?"

"I guess they're also the reason why I'm here", he returned her own words.

He didn't feel all that well anymore all of a sudden. Will really wasn't ready to talk about his parents yet. Not to Abigail. Maybe he could tell Dr. Lecter in some days, but he really couldn't bare to think of them just right now.

So he went on with his outlines, not particularly eager to catch up on talking again. Also Abigail must have noticed the shift in his behavior, because she didn't return anything for a

while and just continued her painting. It wasn't a lake, but a beach scenery.

Will tried to focus on his drawing, but he couldn't concentrate all that well anymore. Abigail really shouldn't have asked about his parents. He fucked up some lines a couple of times, before he almost threw the pencil away. He couldn't stand to be in this room any longer. There were suddenly too many people around and the little boy had started crying because of some unknown reason. Will couldn't bare it.

"I need to get out of here", he just said to the girl, before getting up and leaving for his room.

It wasn't that long after he'd gotten back to his room, that there was a knock at his door. He didn't bother to answer it and just kept staring out of the window. It had snowed some more recently and he liked it. It looked quiet and peaceful and fluffy. Only it didn't stay that quiet anymore, as the door was opened and one of the nurses came in, holding a small notebook.

"Hello, Mr. Graham. I'm just here to let you know that Dr. Lecter informed me about some homework you're required to do until your next session with him", she said and handed him the notebook.

"Homework?", he asked a little surprised and wondered, why the doctor hadn't mentioned anything about it the day before. Maybe he hadn't known himself and had thought about a new way of therapy, or something.

"Yes. He said you're supposed to write down a couple of things, that make you feel bad, or that you're afraid of. And then you should think about some things that you like. Things you like doing, or things you would like to do, but haven't had the chance to do yet", she explained, while Will turned the notebook in his hands. All of its pages were still empty.

"How many?", Will wanted to know and tried to figure out, what the doctor aimed to achieve by giving him this homework.

"A couple, he said", the nurse meant and shrugged.
"Okay...I'll think about it", he answered, before the nurse told him to mind that lunch time started in half an hour and left.

Will barely had time to think about anything he could write into the notebook, anything the psychiatrist would want to discuss with him during his next session, when there was another knock at the door. This time, Abigail stepped inside.

"I just wanted to give that back to you", she said, holding out the sketch of Winston, he'd drawn earlier. "You forgot it."

"Thanks", Will just nodded, not caring to take it, so she laid it down on the table in front of him. His thoughts still were directed on the notebook he'd just gotten and the task he was required to do.

"Guess we both have the same topic that shall not be named, right?", Abigail meant, trying to sound jokingly.

Will didn't make any attempt to reply to her. Everything had went pretty well so far this day, until it suddenly didn't, as soon as Abigail mentioned his parents. He was a little disappointed in himself, because he wasn't able to handle it and just wanted to be left alone with his thoughts and the notebook. He didn't want to be rude or something, he just really needed his peace for a while. Although he probably wouldn't get much of that, when he beat himself up with his own thoughts and tried to figure out, what to write down for Dr. Lecter to discuss with.

"We see each other at dinner, okay?", he brought himself to say, hoping Abigail would understand.

"Don't you come to lunch?", she wanted to know.

"Not hungry", Will just said, averting his gaze. He really wasn't hungry at all right now.

"Okay, see you later then", the girl answered, about to leave. But as she reached the door, Will opened his mouth once more:

"Can you show me a picture of Dana then?"

He smiled a little, because he didn't want Abigail to leave with the thought that he didn't want her around. He tried to, but he just couldn't handle being around people for too long. He hoped she'd understand. And what he hoped for even more was, that he could handle situations like these better. Maybe in some time he would.

"Of course!", she replied, returning his light smile, before leaving him alone again.

Will's eyes wandered to his drawing, looking over the sketched lines and wishing he had a pencil here, so he could continue his work, but the nurse only had given him a pen. He didn't want to ruin his pencil outlines with a pen. But when he could finish it, he would at least have a picture of Winston with him. Then he could pin it to the wall next to his bed.
But he really wasn't in a mood to leave the room, only to get a pencil now. So he just stayed where he was, sitting in one of the chairs next to the window, staring out into the whiteness of the snow and trying to gather some thoughts he could write down into his notebook.

# Making progress

Chapter Notes

Hey :)
thanks for reading, guys! I'm always happy to see the amount of hints and kudos this is getting, it's really amazing and inspiring :)

Monday morning Will woke up, feeling like he hadn't got any sleep at all. His t-shirt was soaked in sweat and his back hurt from all the tossing and turning around. Once again he'd been haunted by a nightmare from his past, that included his father pushing his mother down the few steps on their porch; she stumbled and hit her head so badly, that she had to get a couple of stiches.

Will still could see all the blood from her laceration everywhere; on the ground, on her clothes and he felt somehow sick in the stomach. He had to run to the sink and spit bile. Shaking, he steadied his grip on the lavatory, before splashing some cool water into his face, trying to get rid of the images in his head. But actually he knew, that the only thing he could do, was just pushing them back into some dark corner of his mind, because they seemed to be burned into his memory forever.

Even after he'd taken a shower and put on fresh clothes, not all of his thoughts were back in the here and now, so when he stepped out of the bathroom to find a nurse waiting with his medicine, he was a little startled and confused at first.

"Good morning, Mr. Graham. Are you all right?" the nurse wanted to know, when he was staring at her blankly for a moment.

"Had a bad dream", he mumbled, walking over and took the pills she was holding out to him.

"Again? You should let the doctor know about it", she advised and watched him swallowing the medication.

"Guess so", Will meant, gulping down some water and didn't sound very interested.

"You will attend your session at 9:30am, right?" the nurse said, not as much as to remind him, but more to make clear to him, that it was important to go.

"Yeah...but can you bring me some breakfast, please? I don't feel like going to join the others", he answered, and when the nurse already made an attempt to disagree, he chipped in: "I've attended every meal yesterday...I really don't feel too well right now. Please." Finally, she agreed to bring him some toast and coffee.

It was true, Will actually had been extraordinarily sociable the day before. Not only did he spend the morning with Abigail, watching some TV shows and telling about their dogs, but during dinner he was also chatting to Tom for a bit. So he'd found out, that Tom wasn't in fact a junkie, as he'd assumed first. He was a stock broker, completely burned out, to the point where he wouldn't speak a single word for weeks and his whole body would shake uncontrollably due to either stress or panic attacks.

Apart from that, Will had invested some time into thinking about the homework Dr. Lecter had given him and he guessed, that this, combined with the unusually much social interaction, he'd engaged in, had led to his restless night.

And now, he simply felt drained of all energy, but he hoped that the effect of the medication would at least kick in a bit. It would of course take some time to find out the right dose rate for him, but he had the feeling, that he hadn't been all that worn out and listless, since he took these pills. Otherwise he'd rarely have spent a whole day among other people, without feeling too annoyed, or getting the urge to rip their heads off.

An hour later, he sat in one of the chairs lined up outside of Dr. Lecter's office somewhere down the floor, waiting to get called in. He fidgeted around with the small notebook he was holding, but several minutes later, the door was already opened and the doctor said goodbye to his prior patient, before turning to Will.

"Good morning, Will. Come in, please", Dr. Lecter said, as always with this slight smile on his face.

"Morning", Will replied, getting up and stepping inside the doctor's office.

It was like stepping into another world, because it didn't look like a typical doctor's office and didn't fit in with the rest of the hospital at all. Also it didn't seem like a typical psychiatrist's office. Sure, there was the obligatory couch, to lay down in case it was required to relax a little more and there were two very comfortable looking leather chairs. But the rest of the room rather looked like a crossover between a library and what could as well have been Dr. Lecter's private office at home.

It was a rather large room, holding book shelves with what looked like hundreds of books all spread out over two walls; on the side opposite of the door there were two big windows from where you could see the small park at the back of the hospital that laid cloaked in deep snow. A heavy hardwood desk was set free in the room and where the walls weren't hidden behind books, they were painted in a claret red and decorated with classic paintings.

"Please, take a seat", Dr. Lecter offered, after closing the door and pointed to the leather chairs.

As they both had sat down, the doctor gave Will another moment to take in his surroundings, before starting with his questions.

"How are you feeling today?"

"I didn't sleep too well", Will answered honestly, his gaze directed at his knees.

"Do you want to talk about it?, the doctor asked, without sounding pushy.

"I had another nightmare…'bout when I was a kid", he replied, not ready yet to face all the memories again.

"Are you often still haunted by these memories?" Dr. Lecter wanted to know and Will was glad for a moment, that he didn't dig deeper for the content of his dream.

"Occasionally."

"Is there anything triggering them?"

"I guess…this time it was because I was thinking back of it…when I was writing down the stuff you wanted me to", Will explained, rubbing his brow, because he had a light headache from sleep deprivation.

"May I take a look at it?" the doctor asked and Will handed him the notebook wordlessly.

Hannibal took the book and let his gaze wander over the couple of words his patient had noted down:

"I'm afraid of some of the things I remember from my childhood. My father. Not being able to control my anger.

Before he went on to the other things, those that Will liked and was looking forward to do, he decided that first they had to work on what he feared. Therefore, however, Will would have to get a little more specific. Especially about what seemed to be the key part in all of it: his father.

"Why do you fear your father, Will?" the psychiatrist asked him and Will had to take a deep breath, to steady his thoughts.

"He was nothing like a father should be", he started, chewing on the inside of his cheek, while still not lifting his gaze. Thinking about his father always made him so incredibly angry, that sometimes he barely could contain himself.

"How was he like instead?" the doctor tried to encourage him to go on.

"He was a drunkard. Lost his job as a mechanic because of it…ever since then he was even more beyond all bearing. He was home all day, watching TV, insulting my mother. Screaming at her…at me. Freaking out at the tiniest remark", Will told, feeling anger rise inside of him and pressed his jaws hard together.

"Did he ever lay a hand on you or your mother?"

Will snorted and let out a bitter laugh. Then he finally looked up at the doctor, his voice harsh, when answering: "All the time."

Hannibal could guess that Will had suffered a lot, and he could see, that he still did from his whole behavior. It seemed to be the core of his problems, maybe the reason he didn't want to go on living anymore. He was aware, that all the things he would have to ask him were highly triggering and obviously he shouldn't ask too much of Will. Not at once and not when he didn't seem to have a good day at all. So he decided to progress step by step and to give Will the possibility to stop when he couldn't go on. As he had learned about him so far, Will anyway wouldn't answer anything, if he didn't feel like it.

"How old have you been, when it all started?"

"I guess…it only got real bad, after he lost his job. Before I didn't realize, maybe I was too young, or it wasn't that bad then. But, the first time, I remember him losing it completely, was when I was like six years old. I'd just started going to school…", he told the psychiatrist, knowing very well, that this only just was the beginning of it all and that there was still so much to come. His stomach felt weird again, but he ignored it, running his hands over his face.

"Did no one notice at school? Your friends, or your neighbors?"

"My mother wouldn't let me go to school when I looked too bad. We had to go to the doctor's a couple of times…she told him I had a fight with older kids", Will said, this bitter tone back to his voice.

"Why did she do that?" the doctor wanted to know.

"I guess she was afraid."

"Did she tell you to stay quiet about it as well?"

"My father did…he threatened us…", he answered, now in a low voice, remembering all the things his father would say to him to make him remain silent.

"Did someone ever know, or find out about what he did to you?" Dr. Lecter went on asking then, not daring to ask what Will's father had threatened to do, in order to not outrage his patient, because he sensed that he seemed close to either breaking down, or freaking out.

"We lived a little outside of our village and my parents didn't have many social contacts. I never dared to bring friends home…well, I also never had many friends, to begin with", Will told, glad that he didn't have to tell more about his father. Alone thinking back of this time made him clenching his hands into fists.

"So, no one knew?"

"When I was in high school, I had a good friend…she knew. I guess she let our English teacher know. Somehow it blew off, they found out. I had to see a psychologist, my father was brought to the police station and questioned…."

"What about your mother? And what happened to your father next?"

"I guess next…everything went completely wrong", Will replied, without actually answering anything.

He averted his eyes again, not in the mood to go on here. He already had experienced so much injustice, people didn't believe him, his father managed to lie his way out of everything, his mother wasn't there anymore to support him and he was put down as mentally unstable. None of his prior psychologists had believed him. All the psychiatrists just had proven once more that his mental condition influenced his judgment. There was his word against his fathers, when it came to his mother's disappearance.
He wanted to tell Dr. Lecter. But he wasn't ready yet. He didn't quite trust him yet to not just brush him off as mentally confused, or too young to remember everything, as all the others did.

"It is okay if you cannot go on from here yet", the doctor assured him and Will bit his lower lip.

"I need you to believe me", he just answered.

"Why wouldn't I believe you?"

"No one did", he sighed, running his hands over his face once more and feeling more than exhausted.

"Was there a reason not to believe you?", Dr. Lecter wanted to know.

"They said…I'm mentally unstable. And I was too young when things happened…so I couldn't remember properly, what happened to my mother", Will said, again with a bitter laugh. He felt misunderstood, no one ever had actually made an attempt to really believe him, because there wasn't proper evidence.

"What did happen to your mother?"

"She disappeared", Will just said, not eager to go into detail yet.
He wanted so much for Dr. Lecter to believe him. Will needed this doctor to believe him, because he was the only one so far, making an honest attempt in trying to actually help him. And he didn't want to go this chance to waste again, he didn't want to be put away as crazy once more.

"Can we…continue another time?", he asked then, because he couldn't go on now.
He needed more time, he needed to be sure that he could trust in Dr. Lecter. Besides his headache had gotten worse and he barely could focus anymore. Maybe he should get some sleep before lunch…

"Aren't you feeling well?", the doctor asked, furrowing his brow, somehow in concern.

"Got a headache", Will only meant, kneading his forehead a bit with one hand.

"You should have a rest for a while. Get some sleep, have lunch, get distracted for a bit. Then tomorrow we can pick up where we left of", Dr. Lecter said, sounding encouraging.

"Okay", Will mumbled while they both got up.

"I see you tomorrow at 2pm", he reminded Will, who just nodded.

"And Will?", Dr. Lecter meant, as they just reached the door. "You may not see it as such just right now, but this was some progress today!" He gave him a last light smile of encouragement, before he released him for that day.

# I've got you

Chapter Notes

Hey!
here, have the next chapter already ;) it's a rather dark one, but also one of the fluffiest so far, I hope you like it :)

When Will was sitting in Dr. Lecter's office the next afternoon, he didn't feel any better than the day before. Maybe even worse, because he barely had gotten any sleep at night, once more. Having started to talk about his troubled childhood with the psychiatrist had deeply stirred him up and left his mind restless.

Obviously his goal was to finally get better. To get help from the doctor, because he seemed, like he could actually provide it. But therefore, Will had to open himself up, he needed to be able to confide in him. And he really wanted to, he just wasn't sure yet, if he was already able to do so. But at least, he should try. So he had trudged himself to the doctor's office, even despite he didn't feel particularly well at all. Yet, he didn't want to give in, not when he just started the whole progress of maybe finally getting better.

"Are you feeling better today?", Dr. Lecter wanted to know as they'd taken their places in the black leathered chairs across from each other.

"No…not really", Will meant, rubbing his eyes, because also his headache had returned. Along with some cruel images that he rather didn't want to see anymore…

"Do you want to go through with this session today, or do you rather want to leave and get some rest?", the psychiatrist suggested, seeing that his patient didn't look too well this day.

"No. I…I need to do this", Will assured him, trying to hold his voice steady, while pushing back the memory of his father beating him across the back with a belt, tearing up his skin and leaving nothing but stinging pain…

He'd long wrestled with himself, whether to go to his therapy session or not, after he could barely drag himself out of bed that morning. Darkness had befogged his mind again and also seemed to draw off his physical energy. But his will had conquered the blackness of his thoughts, at least half ways for now, and he was ready to try. Maybe he could make it and put up a fight this time.

"I want to do this", he repeated and finally the doctor nodded his agreement and understanding.

"You are taking your medications?", it was more of a statement than a question.

"Yeah, I do", Will said, getting a better grip on the here and now, leaving the dark pictures behind for a while.

"Did you experience any adverse effects like…", the doctor started.

"It's not the medication", Will interrupted him. "I just…couldn't sleep. I got too much on my mind."

"Though…do you feel any improvements through the medicine already?"

"I don't feel so useless and listless anymore…at least not all of the time", he said, which was true. If he just could get some more proper sleep, instead of restless nights, he probably would notice even more of the effect the medicine had.

"Good. We'll keep on trying this for now", the doctor commented, making notes on a pad. "What do you have on your mind that keeps you from sleeping?", he went on asking then.

"What do you think?", Will replied rhetorically, before he could stop himself. He never would understand, why doctors would ask questions like these, when they already knew what the answer would be. "What we talked about yesterday…and I also thought about what…what I'm gonna tell you today", he explained then, running his hands over his face once more.

He felt somehow dizzy, but at least he could focus on the conversation for now without getting disrupted by memories all the time. The question was, how long he could go on with this, when talking about all of it again.

"Are you ready to share these thoughts now?"

"I don't know", Will shrugged, appearing rather helpless. He wanted to get it off his chest, he wanted nothing more than to confide in Dr. Lecter, but he was afraid of it as well.

"It's okay. We'll just try, alright?", the doctor assured him with a tiny smile and Will only nodded.

"You told me yesterday, that everything went completely wrong after your friend and teacher found out about your father being abusive, why was that so?"

Will sighed and tried to order his thoughts. Actually he didn't really know where exactly to start, because it all was connected somehow.

"I don't quite know where to begin with…", he finally said, sounding like admitting defeat and dropped his shoulders. He was so tired…

"It's alright", Dr. Lecter meant, reassuring once again. "I'm going to help you… You said, your friend knew and told your teacher. How did she know, did you confide in her?"

"I…I brought her home once. I should never have done so…well, after that, Alana figured out everything, even when my father wasn't…he wasn't that bad to me anymore after my mother wasn't there anymore. It was like he wanted to make…he at least wanted to try to

make things up to me…I don't think this ever could be possible, though…he'll never make this up again", Will told, not quite sure, whether the doctor could even still follow him.

"What happened to your mother, Will?"

"She disappeared. I was ten years old and she was…it was like every other day. I went to bed…I heard them arguing and screaming and…he hit her. I'd learned to fall asleep somehow, I was so used to it…I couldn't do anything…I couldn't…", Will said and not only his voice was trembling, but also his body started shaking lightly.

"I cannot do this…", he added then in a low tone, hands pressed onto his face, trying to shield a sob, as all the images crashed over him again.

His father shouting, ranting, throwing with things. Himself punching the wall, trying not to listen to all the screaming going on downstairs, trying to fall asleep, with his head pressed under the pillow, while he heard his mother cry and he was too scared to get up, because his father was still there, just insulting her…

He didn't quite manage to hold it in and a moment later, he was shaken by sobs. Will was trembling hard and his view was blurred from tears, so that he didn't even notice, that the doctor had gotten up and bend down next to him, while he still fought against the dark memories, trying the get a grip on reality again.

Hannibal laid a hand on Will's shoulder, trying to calm him down and to spend some comfort. Whatever it was, that he had wanted to share, he clearly wasn't ready just now. And Hannibal had no intentions to lay any pressure on him, because this could bring more harm than success.

"You don't have to talk about it now", he told his patient in a quiet tone, while Will still was trying to contain his shaking. His sobbing had died down again, but there were tears running down his cheeks silently and he looked, as if he wasn't present with his thoughts.

"You can tell me about your mother, whenever you're ready to. Until then we'll just address some other topics", Hannibal meant, pressing Will's shoulder lightly, not quite sure, whether he actually understood, what he was saying.

"Will?", he asked after a long pause, where his patient was just staring into the room with a blank expression on his face, trembling.

"No!", Will screamed in the next moment and actually startled Hannibal a bit. It was quite obvious to the doctor that his patient was somewhere else right now.

"No, don't! Don't! No, no, no, please…", he started crying more again and sounded highly desperate, in fear and pain.

"Will! Will, you're not there anymore!", Hannibal said, voice raised, but in a calm tone. "Nobody is going to hurt you. You're safe here", he assured him, going down next to him and took Will's face in his hands carefully and he actually seemed to relax a bit under the doctor's touch.

"You're safe", he repeated, running a thumb gently over Will's cheek, noticing that he had calmed down now and seemed to be able to focus on the here and now again.

"You're safe here with me, Will", the doctor's voice reached Will's ears like from far away and he suddenly realized, that he wasn't in his parents' living room anymore, but in Dr. Lecter's office. The doctor himself was kneeling in front of him, a hand still cupped Will's cheek, patting it lightly.

"Will?", the doctor asked him, when realizing, that he seemed to be back and Will only nodded slightly in reply. His gaze was blurred from all the tears he'd shed and his head hurt more than ever, but he wasn't captured in his past anymore.

"You'll be alright, no one can hurt you here", Hannibal assured him once more, squeezing his shoulder to comfort him and make it clear to him that he didn't need to be afraid anymore.

"Here, take this", he meant then, handing Will a handkerchief while getting up to pour him a cup of tea.
Will's hands were still trembling, as he wiped his tears away, his head was dizzy and he had the feeling that he was close to fainting. He really didn't want to remember any of those memories that had just broken down over him, but he did over and over again and he didn't think that he'd ever get rid of them…

"I…I don't feel well at all", he mumbled, when Dr. Lecter returned with a steaming cup of tea, to which he had added some calmative.

"Let me see…", the doctor said, taking his pulse, then feeling his head. "You could need some fresh air, because you look really pale. You just had a flashback that caused you a panic attack, I figure…"

Will only nodded, because he had the impression that as soon as he'd open his mouth, he'd have to throw up. It was really rare, that he had such a strong and deep flashback when he was awake. Usually he experienced it through nightmares, but this was something entirely else. Now he was constantly triggered by therapy, he was always confronted with it and he couldn't just switch his thoughts off.

"I really have to insist to accompany you outside for a while", Hannibal meant then, because Will looked as if he could just faint each moment. A bit fresh air and a short walk could help here. Also to get his head clear.

After they'd stopped at Will's room to get his jacket, they were slowly making their way outside in the snowy park at the backside of the hospital. It was a grey-ish and cool afternoon, so no one else was around.

The doctor had insisted, that Will took a cane, because he appeared pretty weak on his legs. Actually he really didn't like the idea, he wasn't old or fragile, but when they were making their way on the partly icy path, Will was glad he had something to lean onto.

"I wanna tell you…I want to. I'm just…so afraid", Will managed to say after a while. His voice was raspy, but his head had cleared a bit, at least from the ugly images of his past. Now it only still was aching and hammering, but he could bear that.

"It is alright, Will. You don't have to do everything at once", the doctor meant, as always so understanding and once more Will was glad about that fact.

"What are you afraid of?", he went on asking then, as they were walking around the small frozen up pond in the middle of the park.

"Reliving all the memories again…And of your reaction to… to what I got to say about my mother. I don't want you to…also turn away from me…I want you to believe me. I need you…", Will meant and his voice was trembling again.

Will looked and sounded still so completely desperate and even if Hannibal had experienced this a lot in patients, this breakdown touched him more than it possibly should. He knew, that he always needed and should stay professional, but maybe in Will's case, he'd lost his professionalism even before he had to admit to himself, that he cared for him more than he should. Probably he had already lost it at the point, when he saved Will's life on the bridge that night and decided to look after his regeneration and well-being.
Hannibal looked at his pale features, blue eyes rimmed red now from all the crying and he could barely hold himself onto his legs, maybe they should turn around soon. But at least the fresh air seemed to help, even if Will still looked miserable and probably felt even more so.

"Look at me, Will", he said lightly, stopping in his track and squeezed his arm gently, to make him look up at him again, because Will had averted his view to the ground, as he did so many times. He waited for his patient to lift his gaze and look him in the eyes.

"I'm here to help you", he meant. "I'm not going to abandon you. No matter what it is, that you will reveal to me, you can trust in me. I'm here for you", Hannibal added, struggling to not sound too emotional.

This case clearly affected him way too much and he put it down to the fact that he stopped Will from jumping that night. But he was more than glad that he could, that he was there in time. If saving Will's life came at the cost of being too involved with him and his story, then be it.

"Thank you", Will mumbled, looking away quickly, but the doctor already had seen the tears glistening in his eyes. "I'm gonna try telling you the next days"

"That's all I wanted to hear for now", the doctor replied, smiling a little. It didn't appear like it at first, but Will seemed to be a fighter, he wouldn't give up too easily. So also Hannibal shouldn't just give up on him.

"Now, we should get back inside, what do you think? It's freezing", he added, turning back and waited for Will to follow him.

They had almost reached the back entrance again, as Will slipped on a frosted spot on the way, not able to hold his balance, even despite the cane. He just still was too weak on his

legs. But he didn't fall down, though, because the doctor reacted quickly enough to catch and get a hold on him, before Will could get hurt.

"Look out!", Hannibal called out, although he already had caught him and held him close. The cane had skid to the ground, but Will grabbed the doctor's coat.

"I've got you", Hannibal said then with a smile, that Will returned sheepishly. And it didn't only feel like the doctor told him, that he stopped him from falling, but rather that he would be there for him. Will didn't know, that this was exactly what Hannibal had also meant to express, but he just didn't dare to.

# Self-blaming and progress

Chapter Notes

> Hey guys, sorry that I left you waiting with an update, although I actually have written this story already untilt chapter 19, but I just didn't have time recently...I think I'll give you two chapters today, because they also go so nicely together ;)

"So, you decided to give it another try today", Dr. Lecter declared and gave Will a commendatory smile.

After what happened the other day, Hannibal had told his patient, that he'd understand if he would like to skip therapy sessions for a day or two, to get clearer in the head again, before trying to talk about all the things that strained him once more. Seeing him sitting here, right on the day after a heavy panic attack, just proved the doctor again that they were on the right way. He had to trust Will to eventually tell him the whole story in order to provide the help he needed; In order to make Will trust him enough to finally open up completely. It wouldn't bring them anywhere if he made him attend the sessions, if he couldn't or didn't even want to take part in them. So it was actually a really good sign that Will had come here today on his own.

"I cannot really avoid it, you know", Will replied. "Either I'm sitting alone in my room, being haunted by all the memories, or I'm here with you and…try talking about it."

He shrugged, because it really didn't matter that much. If he would have skipped this session, he probably would have done nothing, but sitting around, staring out of the window, shadows hunting him inside his mind. Just as well, he could sit around here, trying to get help in fighting the demons.

"Alright, so let's start where we left of the last time?", the doctor asked and Will just nodded.

"Do you want to tell me more about your friend, Alana? You said you wished you didn't take her home with you. Why?"

"It's not that I didn't…actually I wanted her to know what happened, you know? I…couldn't bring myself to tell her what's wrong with my family. So I thought…if I show her, maybe she'd figure out herself", Will told, sighing as he thought back of that time.

*It was their last year at High School, yet Will still hadn't shown his best and only friend where he lived. He told Alana everything, well except for the things that really mattered and that's why she would mock him a little from time to time. But she wouldn't be his best friend if she didn't respect, that he only would tell her as much as he could bear. One day in early summer, however, with the final exams getting closer and closer, he'd finally invited Alana*

*over for studying together. That was when she learned how Will had lived all those years, she'd even met his father, who surprisingly tried to compose himself somehow, when otherwise he'd yell at Will and insult him if he was too drunk. And even if by then he barely hit Will anymore, Alana was clever enough to draw her conclusions...*

"Why did you want her to know? So that she could help you?"

"No, not really. As I said, my father didn't treat me that badly anymore…but I…I just wanted to…I wanted her to know me. I wanted to give her a chance to get to know to me better, because I liked her. But sometimes she didn't quite trust me, because she thought that I'm behaving weird…after she figured out what's going on, I told her everything. She was my best friend…", he said, voice trembling once more and he felt how his eyes started to burn.

"What happened to her then, Will?", Hannibal asked, when his patient stopped in his narration.

From the way Will's behavior had changed with the last few sentences he spoke, the doctor could already figure, that it didn't end quite well. But maybe he was wrong, even if his senses rarely betrayed him.

"My father should never have known about her. I've never brought any friends…he was aware that I liked her and…well at first everything was okay. But after everyone found out, after he was questioned by the police, he figured that it could only have been Alana, who revealed everything…", Will answered without actually giving away anything concrete just yet. It was tough for him to talk about it again.

He hadn't thought about what had happened to Alana after his father had been released by the police and everything had calmed down a bit again. It was an ugly story that he didn't want to remember. It was cruel and disgusting and it hurt him almost as much as his mother's sudden disappearance. But especially it hurt Alana and made her turn away from him forever.

"He lurked after her one day. I wasn't around…", Will started, his voice bitter, but traced with oppressed tears. He wouldn't start crying again, he wouldn't break down this time...

"What did he do to her?", the doctor asked to help him go on.

"He molested her", he said in a low voice, feeling sick in the guts and so remorseful, although he could have done nothing to prevent it; well, except for not bringing Alana home with him.

"He…he tried to rape her…", Will meant, voice barely audible, but thick with anger and no longer able to hold back his tears. "That sick bastard…", he cried out of rage, pressing a hand to his eyes an tried to contain his sobs a bit.

Hannibal gave Will a moment to gather himself, if this even was possible for him right now.

"Is it alright for me to ask some more questions, or do you rather not want to go on here?", he asked quietly after a while, where Will brushed away his tears, his face clenched in anger and frustration.

"Go on", he said after another moment or two, but getting up to walk around in the office, because he couldn't sit still anymore right now. He had told this story before, he had to, so many times. Yet it was never easy to talk about it. But he knew that he would have to let Dr. Lecter know about it all, in order to have a chance to let it go.

"How did you find out? What happened then, to your father and Alana?"

"That hound told me…he told me and I didn't believe a word, but I was so afraid for Alana… so I went to her house immediately after and…", he stopped to brush away some new tears and run his hands through his anyway ruffled hair while the images shot back into his head once more.

*Mr. Bloom didn't want him to come into their house at first, but as Alana noticed he was around, she said he could come in. Then they'd sat in the living room, Alana's parents discussing about calling the police, whilst Will just sat there awkwardly on the couch next to his best friend, trying to calm Alana down, but obviously there was no way to do so, because he was beyond outraged as well. In the end they'd all gone to the police station...*

"She said it's true, she'd told her parents…they knew what my father was suspected to have done to me as well. So they…pressed charges against him. Well and then everything came out for real. There was a trial…my father went to jail. Alana couldn't bear to be around me anymore and…it was that time after we graduated from High School, anyway…so she went away for college. I've never heard from her again…", he closed, feeling exhausted and leaning against the doctor's desk, closing his eyes for a moment.
It's been too often that he'd told this story, he didn't want to tell it again. He couldn't stand it anymore. Yet he was glad he'd made it through without completely breaking down again.

"How long did your father have to go to jail for? What was he accused of?", Dr. Lecter asked on.

"Not even two years for…attempt rape and child abuse. That's ridiculous", Will snorted, pushing himself of the desk, walking over to the big windows and just staring out for a while.

He never thought that his father actually had gotten what he deserved. There was so much more that he could have been accused of, yet they didn't. Because there wasn't any evidence, apart from the word of a boy, who'd been ten years old when happened, what had just been ignored by everyone else but Will. His mother didn't just run away and left him alone. She'd never have done that. And then his father and his lawyer had tried everything to bail him out, they'd come along with the craziest story about his mother, accusing her of starting the abuse...

"I'm truly sorry for what he did to your friend", he heard Dr. Lecter say, disrupting his thoughts and he realized, that the doctor had stepped next to him in front of the window.

"Do you feel responsible for it?", he added after a moment.

Will turned his head to look at the doctor and again tears were burning in his eyes. He only nodded, because he felt his voice would break if he answered. He had blamed himself a

dozen times. Over and over again, until he was tired of it, because he realized, that it didn't change anything that had happened. Alana was gone and he'd never see her again.

"I thought that…he would never have known her, if I didn't bring her…", he brought out after another while that he spent staring out into the whiteness of some new fallen snow. For a moment he wondered if it would ever stop snowing that winter…

"It wasn't your fault, Will, you couldn't know what would happen", the doctor meant, only a weak attempt to encourage him.

"I think we should stop here for today", Hannibal added then, because he figured that all that Will had told him now, was enough for the moment. He didn't want to exhaust him too much, he didn't want to cause him another panic attack. He had truly suffered enough for now by re-living all those moments again while telling about them. Also he needed to think about the best way how to progress from here.

"You made a big step today, Will", he said, smiling a little and squeezed his shoulder lightly. "You were fighting all the way not to get overwhelmed by your memories again, I could see that. You made it through until this point, this is a good thing. We can work on that."

"There's…so much left to tell…and I'm still afraid of", Will mumbled turning away so that the doctor's hand slipped off his shoulder. Right now he couldn't and didn't even want to think about the other things he still didn't tell him yet.

"You have to take one step at a time. I don't want you to jump up five steps at once, just to struggle and fall down three of them again", the doctor said, but Will didn't look very convinced.

"The day after tomorrow is Christmas Day", Dr. Lecter stated and Will wondered for a moment why he pointed this out. "We only continue therapy next Monday then, with Thursday and Friday being holidays", he meant and Will nodded.

"Yeah, okay. What about tomorrow, though?", Will wanted to know, because the 24th of December wasn't officially a holiday.

"I took the day off, because I invited some colleagues and friends over for a Christmas Eve dinner. However, I was thinking, that maybe you'd like to see your dogs. I could take time for an hour or two in the morning, if you liked", Hannibal suggested and smiled lightly, observing Will's reaction.

He'd already thought about it earlier, but wanted to wait how the session went by. And as Will really did some progress that day, it only seemed appropriate to grant him this reward, because Hannibal knew that it could only be beneficial to Will's healing process.

"You'd really take me to the shelter? Although it's your free day and you've got a dinner to prepare?", Will asked, pretty stunned but in pleasant anticipation.

"If you like me to", Hannibal meant, smiling at Will's reaction and seeing his eyes glisten, but not from tears this time.

"Of course I do!", Will agreed then, smiling as well. "I gotta thank you, really…that's nice of you."

"You've earned it. You made progress…", the doctor replied naturally. "Besides, it's Christmas and I thought, that would lighten your mood after what happened yesterday."

In fact, Hannibal was glad that he could give Will some pleasure by such a simple thing as to take him out to see his pets. He knew from years of work here that it wasn't always easy for the patients in hospital treatment to spend the holidays in the clinic. Also Will didn't have anyone who'd visit him, he'd said so himself. So it would be even more dull and depressing to sit around here, while others at least could see their family. Will said his dogs were his family and since they couldn't come to him, he should at least be able to get to them. Hannibal was happy about his idea and especially that Will got so excited about this perspective.

"I'd really like that", Will repeated then, still with a smile on his face. "I miss them…"

"I'm glad to take you then. So, let's say I pick you up at 9:30am tomorrow? I've got to go to my office anyway, check some things, then I come around to get you", Hannibal said, mirroring Will's smile and made a notice to himself, that he should make Will smile more often, it really fit him. Then he dismissed it again, when realizing what he actually just had thought. He really shouldn't get too involved, at least not more than he already was…

"That's fine with me", Will agreed.

"Good, I'll see you tomorrow then!", the doctor meant as he released Will out of his office.

Before dinner, Will and Abigail sat together in her room, watching some quiz show, like they did sometimes now, when they both were bored and felt up to it. So they had some company, but still Will wasn't necessarily required to talk too much if he didn't like. However, by now the girl was someone, he actually enjoyed and could stand having a chat with, apart from his doctor, apparently.

But now, Will didn't really pay attention to the show, neither did he talk to Abigail. He rather was thinking about seeing Winston and Wesley tomorrow and couldn't await it. Even if the doctor had said he had earned it, he still found it incredibly complaisant of him to take some time just to bring him to the shelter. He really started liking Dr. Lecter more and more and felt truly thankful for everything he had already done for him.

"Abigail?", he asked her, when he got an idea, only disrupting the ads that currently were shown on TV.

"Yeah, Will?", she asked back, turning to him with a little grin.

"Is it…do you think it is okay to make some Christmas gifts to the doctors?", he wanted to know neutrally, but obviously thinking of Dr. Lecter. He just now had wondered about this possibility, because it would be a nice gesture, after his doctor has been really helping him so far.

"Yeah, it's okay", the girl answered. "Actually a lot of people do that…I got some chocolates for Dr. du Maurier."

"Why, are you thinking about giving something to your doc?", she added then curiously.

"I'd like to, yes…he's been helping me a lot already", Will replied.

"You've already got an idea what you wanna give to him?"

"Yeah, I think I do", he answered with a little smile.

# Christmas

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Also this night Will hadn't slept particularly well. His dreams had been filled of old images of him and Alana and his father. And how everything went so incredibly wrong in the end.

It all had started out almost bright and beautiful, he finally had made a real great friend, who actually cared for him and whom he liked a lot…just then his father showed up and destroyed everything. He wouldn't even have forgiven him for that, if it would have been the only thing he fucked up in Will's life. But as it was, he fucked up his whole life…

However, as Will got out of bed and into the shower, he didn't think about the darkness and his nightmares anymore, all that was on his mind for now, was being able to see his dogs soon. He couldn't believe that he got so excited over such a little thing, but his dogs were his only remaining family after all and he missed them a lot.

When he was ready and dressed, it only was shortly after 8am, so he decided to grab some toast and coffee in the dining room. Apart from the nurse who gave him his medication, there only was one other patient around so far, an elderly woman he hadn't met before. But he didn't feel much like talking, he just wanted to fast forward time and leave for the shelter already.

As he went back to his room, he still had some time left until Dr. Lecter was supposed to come and pick him up. Will sat down at the small table at the window and took a pencil to work over one of his drawings once more; he edited some shadows and lighting, until he finally was content enough with it to not just scrunch it up and throw it away, as he'd done a dozen times before.

At 9:30am punctually there was a light knock at his door that he'd already awaited while pacing through the room restlessly.

"I'm coming", he said, as the door was already opened and Dr. Lecter was standing in the doorsill. "Morning", he added and sounded almost joyful.

"Good morning, Will", the doctor replied, smiling as he noticed that his patient seemed to be in a really good mood this day. Well, obviously, he was happy to visit his dogs. "Are you ready to leave?", he asked then.

"Yeah, let's go", Will said and they made their way outside and to the doctor's car.

"Did you sleep better tonight? You don't seem to be so drenched", Dr. Lecter wanted to know as they were driving to the shelter.

"Not really…I just cannot get these things out of my head", Will replied, staring out of the side window at houses decorated with Christmas lights, Santa Clauses and reindeers.

He'd never quite liked this trend, it seemed too cheesy to him. Or maybe he just hated it by now, because as a kid he always wanted to decorate their house like that, but his father never wanted to spend money on such things as Christmas decoration…

"But it doesn't matter now…", he meant, pushing all the memories back into the darkest corners of his mind. "I just…can we just not talk about that for now?", Will added, sighing. He just wanted to get his head off those things for a while, so it wouldn't quite help to talk about them right now.

"As you like", the doctor replied, looking over at him shortly to assure him that it would be alright. "No more dark talk then until Monday."

"Good."

"You're right, you need a break from all your memories. At least when you can control it during daytime. As for what concerns your restless sleep, I would recommend to add a sleep-inducing drug to your medications", Dr. Lecter said.

"Well, that would help me to fall asleep, but it wouldn't keep the dreams away, would it?", Will answered not very convinced. He didn't like the perspective of taking more pills at all.

"I'm afraid, but I think there's not a way to control our dreams yet", the doctor replied as he drove onto the parking lot next to the shelter.

After they'd got Winston and Wesley they were walking through the same park again as the last time they were here. By now the snow lay so high at both sides of the paths that Wesley, small as he was, could completely disappear in the white and he'd draw lines where he was walking.

Hannibal watched Will forming snowballs and throwing them for Winston to run after; he was laughing at the dog's confused look when he caught a mouth full of coldness and a smile spread over the doctor's face. Once more he thought how adorable Will was, when he was playing and fooling around with his dogs, seeming so completely careless and joyful. It was almost hard to believe that this man, kneeing down in the snow, patting the dogs and laughing, while one of them licked his face, was the same troubled and broken patient who suffered from nightmares and panic attacks and had broken down in his office, shaking and sobbing, just two days ago.

As Will looked up from his pets for a moment and met Hannibal's eyes, his own clouded in happiness, the doctor felt a strange sensation in his chest that he couldn't quite put a hold onto. Will gave him a wide smile that Hannibal returned, before he bend down to scratch Winston's ears, while the doctor bit his bottom lip.

It wasn't a good sign, that he already got so attached to Will. If he was being honest, he wanted nothing more but to join in in his play with the dogs, but he didn't, just to preserve some distance, that he obviously had to keep. He was his doctor and Will was his patient. Probably they shouldn't even be here right now, it was his day off, after all.

He shouldn't spend it with a patient, even if he tried to persuade himself that it was only for Will's benefit and to increase chances that therapy actually worked better. But there was still that other part of him, that was simply glad to see Will like this, enjoying himself, and he had to admit that he really liked him when he was all happy and frolic.
After another while of throwing snowballs, Will picked Wesley up, because he was tiny and had short fur and started to tremble a little.

"Guess we gotta bring you back, buddy, huh?", he asked the dog, pressing him to his chest and whistling for Winston, who came running to his side instantly.

"We've got to bring them back", Will meant as he reached the doctor and sounded sad already confronted with the perspective of leaving his dogs behind again.

"We can come back", Hannibal said, because he didn't want that Will went back to the hospital, feeling bad about the dogs, because this clearly shouldn't be the purpose of this trip. He'd brought Will to get distracted and just feel good for a little bit.

"You'd do that for me?", Will asked hopefully.

Anytime. Obviously the doctor didn't speak out this ridiculous thought, but just nodded. "Yes. You make progress in your therapy, then we come to see your dogs, deal?", he said with a light grin.

"Deal", Will replied, smirking and pressed a small kiss on Wesley's fury head, which made Hannibal smile.

"Have you decorated your home, doctor?", Will wanted to know after a few moments of silence, while they were walking back to the shelter.

"A bit, at least on the inside. I'm not really at home that much, but I have always liked Christmas decoration", the doctor answered. "Why do you want to know that?"

"I didn't expect you to be the kind of person who'd put a Santa on their rooftop", Will commented, chuckling.

"I'm not!", Hannibal threw in playfully, making things clear here. He'd indeed never put a huge Santa Clause in a reindeer sleigh or something similar to it onto his rooftop.

"No, it's just…I find it cheesy now, but as a kid, I would have actually loved it. We never did that, though…", Will explained and sounded regretful.

"How was Christmas, when you were a boy?", Hannibal wanted to know, not just out of curiosity, he was so used to ask these kinds of questions every day, that he didn't even have to think about them anymore.

Will sighed and looked up at the doctor, a forced grin on his face. "No dark memories, remember?"

"Right, I'm sorry. It's just my job to ask these things sometimes" he answered and feeling a little sheepish, which wasn't an emotion he experienced often.

"How was Christmas when you were a boy?", Will repeated the doctor's own question curiously. "I mean, when…when your family was still with you", he added carefully.

"It was my favorite time of the year", Hannibal started, re-calling all these happy memories, although it's been more than thirty years since then.

"My mother would bake a dozen different kinds of cookies and my sister and I helped her with it, obviously", he said, smiling when thinking back of these times. "My father went into the woods to get us a tree…I'd accompany him and we'd pick out the nicest one. My family owned our own little forest back in Lithuania….", he stopped for a moment to remember all the times he'd played there when he was little and got a bit nostalgic.
"For Christmas, family and friends would come around, we made a big feast out of it. It was merry and everyone was always so happy to be around. Even my grandfather, who was a bit of an unpleasant fellow, would take himself together and be nice for those couple of days", the doctor told and laughed a bit at it.

"That sounds really nice…", Will answered, smiling lightly when seeing his doctor laugh about those happy memories. Probably he would have been a little jealous under different circumstances, like he was sometimes when people told about their perfect childhood. But as he knew more of the doctor's story and that it wasn't perfect at all, because his parents and sister had died in a car crash, he almost felt a little bad for Dr. Lecter.

"It was indeed", the doctor sighed a little. "What's left from that now, is that I still always try to spend these days with some good friends…there's no one left of my family." Well, only a few distant cousins back in Lithuania whom he called a couple of times a year, but nothing more.

"And you're not married?", Will observed.

"No, only to my work", Hannibal replied, sounding a tiny bit remorseful.

He just hadn't met the right person yet. The only one he could have imagined marrying so far, at least when he had been younger, was his best friend and colleague, Bedelia. He knew her since they had been studying together and in all those years, they'd come to a point where they had tried being more than just friends, but it didn't work out at all. They just couldn't be a couple, unless they wanted to end up killing each other, so they decided to just be best friends, because that worked out perfectly well.
They reached the shelter way too fast for Will's taste and it made him a little sad that he already had to say goodbye to Winston and Wesley again. He wished that he could just take them with him and sneak them into the hospital, but he knew very well that this wasn't possible. So the only thing that he could do was trying to work hard on getting better, always cooperating with Dr. Lecter, like he had the past week, so that he could make progress. And who knew, maybe he'd not even have to visit his dogs at the shelter so often anymore, but could go home with them in some time?

But at the moment, he really didn't want to think about going home. They wouldn't let him leave too soon, considering that he got panic attacks during therapy sessions…he still could hope, though. And he figured that at least it was a good thing that he got his hope back.

When he told the psychiatrist on the way back to the hospital, Dr. Lecter looked at him, lips turned up in a slight smile.

"Hope is said to be the only thing stronger than fear", he answered. "That shows, that you're on the right way here. And I think I just figured out a way for you to manage keeping a grip on reality, while you talk about your past. But I'll explain this to you on Monday…no dark thoughts today, remember?", the doctor added with a grin that Will mirrored.

When they reached the hospital, Hannibal walked Will in, not because he couldn't find back on his own or would run away, because he wouldn't. But rather because he wanted to make sure he was really alright. He couldn't bear the thought of leaving him in a sad mood about his dogs or anything else right before the holidays.

"Are you feeling okay now?", he wanted to know when they were back in Will's room, where Will had taken a seat on his bed and the doctor just was standing at his side.
"Yeah, I'm gonna be okay for now, I guess", Will replied, nestling on his blanket.

"Dr. du Maurier and I will be on call at least on 26th. So if there's anything that's not okay, just let one of the nurses know, alright?", the doctor said encouragingly.

"Yeah, alright", he answered, remembering the gift he had for Dr. Lecter and got up to get it.

"I've got a little something for you…because of Christmas and all", Will meant sheepishly as he took the drawing he'd earlier still worked on and walked over to the psychiatrist.

"Uhm, it's nothing special, but…well", he mumbled, as he felt his cheeks turn hot.

"Merry Christmas, Dr. Lecter", Will added, when he gave his drawing to the doctor, who looked a little surprised.

"Thank you, Will. This really wouldn't have been necessary but thank you for thinking of me", Hannibal meant honestly, when taking the black and white pencil drawing of a flower and actually felt flattered.

It was a white dahlia, accurately drawn with precise mark-making and beautifully shadowed just in the right places.

"And it is something special very well…this is beautiful, you've got exceptional talent", he said then, smiling at Will, who blushed even more than before and Hannibal once more had to push away the thought of how adorable he looked by doing so.

"What does the dahlia mean?", he wanted to know then, because he really wasn't too adept in botany.

"The dahlia means…", Will started, feeling himself blush again and averted his gaze for a moment. "It stands for gratitude", he meant then, eyes directed on the floor. *And it also means that through your good character, my whole being turns bright and happy.*

He'd given this a lot consideration. It wasn't tough to decide that he wanted to draw something for his doctor, since he already had admired his work when he saw it at Will's flat. So he figured this would be probably exactly the right thing to do, draw something for him. But he'd needed longer to figure out what exactly he could draw, just to dismiss a dozen ideas again in the end. He'd started a sketch just to scrunch the paper sheets for umpteenth times, until he finally found the perfect motive. He wanted to say thank you, so the white dahlia was just the right flower to express this feeling.

Its second meaning was obvious to Will as well and when he thought about it more, he had to admit, that it also fit exceptionally well. Dr. Lecter was a great person, he was the only psychiatrist he could ever trust so far, he was the only person whom he felt really comfortable with at the moment and that meant a lot. Also the doctor had really done everything he could so far to make therapy as agreeable as possible for Will and had helped him in so many ways, starting with saving his life, obviously. Dr. Lecter had given him something like another chance in life, he already had made clear to him so far, that he could make it, he could get better. He just had to hold on and believe that there were things worth living for. Dr. Lecter had showed him just again by making it possible to see his dogs.

All that made the drawing of a dahlia the perfect gift for him, at least in Will's eyes. And the doctor seemed to see it like that as well, because he looked really happy about the drawing. Maybe he also was simply glad about Will's gesture, but that was exactly what he had intended.

"I see…", the doctor meant, looking between Will and the drawing. "This is really nice of you, Will", he added, smiling once more.

"I'm glad you like it", Will answered sheepishly.

"Very much", Hannibal made clear and just looked at Will for a long silent moment, still smiling at his bashfulness. Was it very weird to have the urge to hug him now? A little, maybe. But considering that he still was Will's doctor and he also didn't seem to be the hugging kind of person, he banned that thought and cleared his throat, shifting his thoughts back to a safer place.

"Thank you again. I really have to excuse myself now. Last dinner preparations are waiting for me", he said, observing Will's features that seemed to sadden a tiny bit. But maybe he also just imagined that.

"Yeah, right", Will replied. "Then I don't wanna keep you away for any longer… And you're welcome, by the way….I guess, I've got to thank you for that nice morning…taking me out to the shelter again. That was…uhm…kind of you", Will mumbled, staring at the floor once again.

"You're welcome as well", Dr. Lecter answered. "Merry Christmas, Will", he added then with a last smile, before he had to leave.

Chapter End Notes

I just really had to put that quote from the Hunger Games in here, the one with hope being stronger than fear, it kinda seemed fitting :D

# Dinner and cookies

Chapter Notes

Hey guys,
I'm so, so, so extremely sorry that I didn't update the story for ages, but I somehow got carried away by life, there were so many other things and I somehow almost forgot about the story :/ and when I wanted to update again, I realized there was a part missing from this chapter, I had accidentally deleted it...luckily I could get it back from a friend, so now I can FINALLY upload for you to read it. I'm sorry for the huge delay and I hope you enjoy it! And I also hope that I can update more often in next time, I cannot promise anything, but I hope to! :)

Will spent the afternoon drawing. Soon he'd made some sketches of Winston and Wesley, playing in the snow, leaving their footprints on the white ground. As always he wasn't quite glad about the shadowing at first, but he had time without ends to work over it.
As he laid the pencil away, his fingers were numb and his eyes hurt from just staring onto the sheet of paper for hours. But the outcome was quite amazing, he really liked it. And it didn't happen too often that he actually felt content about his work. Anyway, this drawing had turned out so well, that it made him smile a little and he planned to pin it onto the door of the closet with some tape. He could ask the nurses for some later, when he'd go to dinner…
Later? In fact it had grown dark outside a while ago and when he looked on the watch, it showed him, that it already was 5:40pm. So he could leave for dinner soon.

"Hey, Will", Abigail greeted him as they basically run into each other on the floor outside of the dining room.
"Hi there", he answered with a little grin, that the girl gave back at him.
"I haven't seen you around, what have you been doing?", she wanted to know as they walked inside the room and over to the buffet to get themselves some food.
"This morning I was at the shelter, seeing my dogs", he started telling, while eyeing the dishes that looked way better today than usually. Well, it was Christmas Eve after all, so probably they thought they could give their patients some nice food for once.
"And then I was drawing the whole afternoon…"
"Did Dr. Lecter take you there again?", Abigail asked, while putting some grilled potatoes on her plate.
"Yeah, he did", Will replied sounding somehow sheepish and biting his lip as he noticed that he blushed, for whatever reason, but Abigail didn't notice. "I really appreciate that a lot."
"You're so lucky…I wish I could see Dana as well. But my grandparents didn't bring her with them, obviously", she sighed, as they were looking for a place to sit and chose one near the windows. That's where you could talk best without getting disrupted by someone else passing by all the time.

Meanwhile Hannibal had added the last touches to his dinner. He'd accurately set the table hours ago, checked on the roasted goose every now and a while and cleaned up the kitchen. He'd also made the salads, the aperitifs, some other fixings already had been prepared the night before. Everything was ready now, different wines and water bottles set on the table as well as candles.
His dining room opened into the living room, where he'd set up the Christmas tree in a corner and decorated it a week ago already. Hannibal let his view wander around, a hand run over the top of his piano, as he walked by. Everything seemed perfect, just as he wanted it to be. Now his guests could arrive.
First was Bedelia, she always was on time, even a bit early. But not as much as it would be considered rude. He could recognize her by now on the way she'd ring the doorbell, always two times real shortly. Never differently.
"Good evening, Bedelia", he greeted her, as he opened the door for her to step in, a glad smile on his face.
"Hello, Hannibal", she said, smiling back at him, before he hugged her lightly and kissed her on the cheek.
"You arrived first, as always", he meant in a mocking tone as he took her coat and led her over to the dining room then.
"I wanted to make sure that you've everything perfectly set up, before the others come around", Bedelia answered with a wink.
"You know that everything always is perfect when I'm hosting a dinner", Hannibal grinned at her and then invited her to take a seat. Just then the doorbell rang a second time.

"Will?", Abigail's voice disrupted his thoughts. He just mentally walked through that park again, with Winston jumping up at his side, Wesley somewhere hidden in the snow and Dr. Lecter laughing about it…
"Sorry?", he asked and shook his head, to concentrate on their conversation again rather than on this beautiful memory. He didn't have too many nice memories, but this one way definitely one he could hold on to in case the darkness would threaten to cloud his mind again.
"I just asked you what it was, that you gave your doc for Christmas", Abigail repeated, grinning at his confusion. "Where've you been? Not a dark place again, I hope?", she added then, looking at him a little concerned.
Abigail didn't particularly know about his past, he'd just told her, that he had some rough stuff to deal with, that he couldn't get rid of so far and that was pulling him down, when he couldn't fight it anymore and gave in to it. Will neither did know more about the reason that brought the girl here, other than something happened with her parents and that's why she lived with her grandparents now.
"No dark talk for today", Will re-called the doctor's words and shook his head again to underline his statement.
"No, I…I just was at the park again, playing with my dogs", he explained and took a sip of his water.
"Ehm…I drew something for him. A dahlia", he added then, feeling sheepish once again and couldn't quite explain why.
"That sounds nice, really. It's a sweet gift", Abigail meant honestly.
"Really?", Will asked bashfully, blushing a little.

"Yeah, really", she assured him, laughing. "He liked it, didn't he?"
"Yeah, he did…I got something for you as well. You only get it tomorrow, though", he said grinning.
"Oh stop it, you're too cute!", Abigail gave back and giggled.
"Nah, just bored", Will corrected grinning. "Are you up for some desert?"

Hannibal opened the door for Frederick Chilton and his companion. He'd known Frederick since they'd studied together, just like Bedelia and his two other guests who hadn't arrived yet. As usual, Chilton looked as dapper as Hannibal himself, with his neat suit and tie pin. The beautiful dark haired woman at his side was obviously his fiancé, whom Hannibal had heard about, but hadn't met before, but he had naturally insisted that she'd join them for dinner as well.
"Good evening, you two", Hannibal said, stepping aside. "Come on in."
"Hello there, good to finally see you again", Frederick meant, laughing and hugged Hannibal, then turned around to his pretty companion.
"Hannibal, this is Alana, my fiancé", Chilton added, beaming at her and she gave him a sweet smile back, before turning her attention to their host.
"Alana Bloom", she said smiling and extended her hand. "Thanks for the invitation."
"Oh, you're welcome, it's nice to meet you, Alana", Hannibal returned, wondering for a second where he'd heard her name before, because it sounded oddly familiar and not because Frederick had mentioned it before. He'd just talked about his "fiancé" all the time. But then he dismissed that thought and turned his attention fully back to his guests.
"Let's go over to the dining room and open up some wine, Bedelia is already there", he said, leading Frederick and Alana over to where the dining table was and they greeted each other, while Hannibal tried to decide which bottle of wine to open first. However, this decision was taken from him for the time being, because the doorbell rang a third time that evening. It had to be either Beverly or Brian, as they were the both still missing from their little gathering.

"Can I at least get a tip?", Abigail asked, as they were sitting face to face and cross-legged on her bed after dinner, playing cards.
"You're gonna know if I gave you a tip", Will meant with a lopsided grin. "Also you'll see tomorrow."
"But I'm so curious!", she gave back, lying down one of her cards on the pile.
"I can see that", Will reassured her, trying to decide which card to choose next.
"Okay, I guess I've got to wait, haven't I?"
"Just until tomorrow morning", he said, smiling, because she seemed like a five year old in her excitement.
"I've got something for you too" Abigail meant, taking a card from the other pile, because she doesn't seem to have any fitting ones.
"Yeah?", Will asked and felt really happy about it. He could count all the times on one hand that he'd actually gotten something nice and not just practical for Christmas. So it meant a lot to him, that Abigail, whom he barely knew for two weeks, had thought of him.
"Yeah", the girl replied grinning.

"Damn, now I'm curious as well!"
"Gotta wait until tomorrow", Abigail meant, sticking out her tongue at him mockingly.

As it turned out, Hannibal wouldn't have to open the door a fourth time that night, because Brian and Beverly had come over together.
"Sorry that we're late, but that dork took ages to take a shower", Beverly said when they had said hello to each other, teasing Brian, as always.
It has gone like this since their days at college, Brian and Beverly always calling the other funny names, although or just because they were best friends.
"You're living together now?", Hannibal wanted to know as they took off their coats, because that was new to him.
"Yeah, he needed a place to crash after he split up with his boyfriend", Beverly let him know.
"Then we decided to do a flat share", Brian commented, grinning.
"Well, just because I'm too nice to throw you out", Beverly mocked him.
"Do you guys want to bicker around there, or come over so that we can finally start to have dinner?", Frederick called over from the dining room.
"We can bicker around while having dinner as well", Brian meant, winking.
"You both will never grow up, will you?", Hannibal asked them rhetorically, while they joined the others, noticing once again that they could just as well be still students with their behavior.

When Will was lying in bed that night, he thought that he long didn't have such a great day as this one. He'd felt truly happy when playing with his dogs in the park. He was glad that Dr. Lecter liked his little gift and also that his other drawings had turned out nice as well.
Also he felt like he'd bonded with Abigail so far as he could see her as something like a younger cousin. Not a sister yet, they didn't know each other that much, but she was – apart from Dr. Lecter – the only person he bothered being around and actually enjoyed having a talk with. And he really hoped, that he could somehow keep that friendship up, even after Abigail would leave inpatient treatment, because she had said, that she'd be allowed to leave the hospital soon after New Year's. This wasn't too long anymore. Will, however, had to stay longer, as it seemed right now, but he was already a little afraid how he'd pass his days without Abigail around, he'd be too bored again, over thinking too much.
For now he dismissed those thoughts again, because he didn't want to feel bad now, not when he hadn't the whole day. He just wanted a quiet night for once, that's all he was asking for. Recreative sleep, without getting disrupted by nightmares that would keep him wide awake and drained off his energy.
Instead he shifted his tired mind back to the park slipping into sleep while thinking back of this morning.
There it was beautifully nice and quiet, apart from the excited barks of his dogs. He formed snowballs for Winston and Wesley to chase after and in a moment of waggishness he threw one of those snowballs in the direction of his doctor, who was standing by with an amused look upon his face. The ball hit him on the shoulder and Will was curious about what would happen next. But instead about complaining about Will's foolishness, Dr. Lecter picked up

some snow himself to form a ball and threw it back at Will, who ducked away, laughing, ready to fire back…

"So, how did you guys meet?", Brian wanted to know, as they'd just started with the desert and looked curiously between Frederick and Alana.
"It was on a conference in D.C. that we both attended", Alana started telling.
"Yes, it was one of those fancy things where you'd stay for a couple of days for lectures and these things, you know what I mean...", Frederick added his part of the story.
"We all stayed in the same hotel, then one evening I was ready to go back to my room, but then I couldn't find my key card."
"He was waiting for the elevator on the way down to the reception desk, whilst I was in the elevator ready to give him back the card that he'd apparently lost in one of the lectures we had together. I didn't know it was his, picked it up to ask the concierge whose it was. Well, and then I returned it", Alana went on, laughing.
"And I invited her on a drink and everything else went down from then", Chilton closed, grinning and took Alana's hand to press a light kiss on it.
"Aw, stop it, you guys are too cheesy", Beverly complained in faked disgust, but winking at them.
"So, when can we expect the invitations for the wedding?", Hannibal threw in, laughing as well.
"We plan for spring or early summer", Frederick explains.
"And when do you guys plan to get married?", Alana wanted to know, looking expectantly at Hannibal and Bedelia.
"Oh no, we're not a couple", Bedelia made clear, laughing.
"They were!", Brian throws in giggling.
"Yes, it didn't really work out for us", Hannibal said and wondered why people always made that assumption.
"That really sucked, because Bry and I were already betting in college that they'd get married…well, I lost", Beverly told and made them all laugh about that memory.

As he woke up the next morning, he didn't remember the dream about the park and the snowball fight with his doctor, because it had been washed away by yet another nightmare. His head was throbbing as he pressed his eyes shut and reached over to the night stand for a glass of water. There his hand didn't get to catch a bottle, but bumped into something else he didn't know was there.
So he opened his eyes carefully and lifted up his head a little to see why it wasn't his water bottle standing there as he'd put it last night. He found a box the size of a small book there, sat on the nightstand, wrapped in dark green wrapping paper, decorated with a small red bow. Last night it definitely hadn't been there. Had a nurse brought it in for him? What was in it, and more importantly, whom was it from?
Ignoring his throbbing headache, Will sat up on his bed, reaching for the parcel and carefully shaking it. Judging from the sound, something eadable must be in it. He started unwrapping it carefully, not just tearing off the paper, like he used to when he was a kid. Finally he held a box with Christmas-y patterns in his hands, angels, trees clouded in snow, mistletoes.

Will opened the lid and the smell of freshly baked cookies reached his nose. They had all different sizes, shapes and colours, light and dark ones, some with sugar frosting, others decorated with chocolate or nuts. They were obviously homemade. Ecxept from the delicious cookies, there was also an accurately folded piece of paper tucked into the box. Even before unfolding and reading it, Will already knew by now whom this gift was from.

Dear Will,
Merry Christmas, again! I hope you could get some relaxing sleep and weren't haunted by another nightmare. Enjoy the cookies and the holidays. See you on Monday,
Dr. Hannibal Lecter.

# Demons from the past

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, here's the next chapter :)
thanks for reading and merry Christmas!

"Get out of my head!", Will whined and pressed his hands onto his temples, trying to rub the images behind his closed eye-lids away. But they seemed like burned into his retina.

*Will was ten years old again, had woken in the middle of the night, after he had finally fallen asleep only hours ago while trying to shut out the rumbling of his parents' argument. It was quiet now, almost too quiet and he didn't know whether this was a good sign or rather not. But he was thirsty and couldn't just ignore it and go back to sleep.*

*So he got out of his bed, tip toeing out of his room and down the hall to the staircase, his eyes adjusting to the darkness around him. He didn't dare to switch on the light out of fear his father might have passed out on the couch downstairs and wake up from it. Passing by the staircase, he slipped into the bathroom, closing the door behind, before turning the light on.*

*He was so tired, that he almost stumbled over the small carpet laid out on the bathroom floor, but he could stabilize himself on the sink. Just a few sips of water, then he'd lie down again. But when he looked down into the basin, he gasped and felt sick in the guts, because there were some blood stains that definitely hadn't been there when he went to bed in the evening…*

"What did you do to her?", he screamed into the empty hospital room on the verge of hysterical tears.
However, he didn't see his room on the psychiatric floor of the hospital in front of him, but his father in the living room of his childhood home. Will knew somewhere in the back of his head, that it was only his imagination, but it seemed so incredibly real, he couldn't manage to fight it down.

"Mr. Graham, are you alright? I heard you…", someone who had just stepped into the room asked him, but Will only turned around, screaming at them.

"Where is mom?! What did you do?"

His subconscious mind realized, that it was a nurse who just had come in to check on him, but he didn't see her as the one she was. His memories had started to mix with reality again, since he had been startled from another one of his nightmares the night after Christmas. After he'd done so well for the last two days, now everything seemed to crash down on him, willing to bury him.

Will had stayed in his room during breakfast and hadn't eaten anything, already fighting out the battle between imagination and reality in his head, as a nurse had brought him some food earlier that he didn't touch in the end.

When he'd been too tired to keep his eyes open any longer, due to his constant sleep deprivation, he fell asleep somewhen around noon. Only to wake to new nightmares, this time screaming, still seeing his father in the same room, even when he was sure he was awake.
And in his panic and fear, now he didn't even quite recognize the nurse anymore, but made her a part of his living nightmares.

"Get out, get out of my mind! Leave me alone!", he continued screaming, pressing his hands on his face, trying to shut out the past.

"Mr. Graham, you need to try and calm down", she tried to get through to him, reaching a hand out, to touch his arm lightly, but he pushed her away.

"Don't! Don't touch me, leave me alone!"

"Listen to me, I won't bother you, Mr. Graham…Will", the nurse tried again and came a step closer, but Will shied away, bursting out in tears.

"She didn't run away…mom would never have left me alone", he started sobbing, breaking down in a corner of the room, fighting against his father's voice in his head. He couldn't stand hearing his words again and again and again.

"Go away…please, please leave", he whimpered and the nurse finally seemed to know better than to make another attempt at calming him.

Will didn't notice her leaving, he just realized after some moments that he was alone in the room. His father's voice still echoed in his head, making him want to knock it on the next wall just to calm it down. But he felt too weak for it, he couldn't even bring up the strength to pull himself up, so he just stayed down on the floor, crying, losing the track on time.

The next thing he remembered is a warm hand on his upper arm, pressing it lightly.

"Will, can you hear me?", a familiar voice asked. It wasn't his father's, so he dared to open his eyes.
Everything was a little blurred and out of focus, but after some moments, he managed to fix his gaze on Dr. Lecter, kneeling at his side, looking at him with a mix of concern and curiosity.

"Doctor?", he brought out weakly, his head close to explode and he had to press his eyes shut in order to not throw up. He felt so weak and dizzy…

"Do you want me to help you get up?", the psychiatrist asked him quietly, as if he knew that Will's head was bursting.

Will only could nod lightly, regretting it instantly as it felt like a bomb had just exploded in his brains. So the doctor laid hold of him and Will just could do as much as grab his coat in order to not fall down.

"It's okay", Dr. Lecter said, as Will sat on the edge of his bed with his help.

"They had to give you a sedative injection", he added, which explained why Will felt as if he'd slept for a week, although he actually hadn't slept properly for days.

"We can talk about it now if you want, or when you wake up later, in case you feel like sleeping it off", Hannibal offered, as he looked over his patient, who made a real pitiful impression.

He was pale as a sheet and seemed to have cried, besides he appeared to be weak on his limbs and shaking a little. The doctor couldn't tell, however, if it was because he was cold from lying on the floor, or still the aftermath of his panic attack, that he'd obviously had, judging from what the nurse had told him on the phone.

"No sleep", Will managed to say in a raspy voice, reaching for his bottle of water.

"Did the sleep inducing drugs I prescribed you not help?"

"No…"

He sighed, took a deep breath and tried to re-arrange what had happened the past few hours. But he stopped right at the thought of it, he didn't want to see all of this again.

"How can I get it out of my head?", he wanted to know then, desperate. "I can't get it out of my head…"

"What do you want to get out of your head?", the doctor asked, curiously, while pulling a chair close to the bed. Will had laid down by now, huddled together, legs pulled up close to his torso.

"The image of my father killing my mother", Will replied so quietly that the psychiatrist barely could hear it.

"Was that what you saw happening earlier? Did you see them here with you, fighting?" Will only nodded, feeling tears burn in his eyes again and rubbed over them with a hand.

"Your imagination seemed to turn real?", the doctor went on asking trying to get a wider picture of what had happened.

"I don't know what's real anymore when it comes to my mother…", Will finally admitted, sounding more defeated than ever.

"What happened to her, Will?"

"One day she was just there…they were fighting, as always…the other day, she was nowhere to be found. Gone….He told me…he told me that she left me, she run away and left me

behind…", Will said, burying his face in his pillow then, to drown his tears there.

He didn't want the doctor to see him this weak again. Not now that he just had felt so comfortable around him. Everything had been alright those last two days. Christmas day had been really nice, waking up to find the doctor's homemade cookies that he had long forgotten over by now, however.

Then he had spent the morning with Abigail, before she headed out for a trip with her grandparents. They had exchanged their gifts, Abigail had braided him a little bracelet out of brown and black leather tape that tangled around his wrist now. He'd given her the drawing of her dog and she had totally loved it…

"That night I woke up, because I was so thirsty…in the bathroom sink, there was blood…I was so tired…the next day, it was gone…"

"This made you assume that your father did something bad to your mother?", Dr. Lecter wanted to know.

"This wasn't all…something weird happened…", Will stopped here, turning his head back to face the doctor. His tears had stopped and his look was hard now.

"I'm not crazy", he stated then. "They all said I'm crazy…delusional. They claimed that I couldn't remember…that I was distraught and made it all up to cope with the fact that my mother left me…"

"What do you want to tell me, Will?", Hannibal asked carefully, repressing his curiosity, because he sensed that they might have reached the point now, that Will always tried to avoid talking about.

Will sighed, running a hand over his face, feeling so endlessly tired. Actually he did want nothing more but sleep. On the other hand, he despised nothing more than sleep at the moment, because this was the quickest way to make his memories come back, haunting him.

He'd told the story about his mother a couple of times now. No one had actually believed him, they always had found new excuses to make him seem out of his mind, so that he was pushed from one psychologist and psychiatrist to the other. By now he sometimes believed himself, that it all was just his imagination. That he could never have found a real way to re-construct what had happened that night. That everything was just a desperate turn of his mind to explain why his mother would have left him alone with his father. But then it had felt so real and logical…

What could happen if he told Dr. Lecter as well, other than he'd not believe him? That he'd also tell him it wasn't possible, that he couldn't even remember properly anymore, after all these years. Will actually was more scared than ever, because he cared about this doctor's opinion. He seemed like his last chance, his last hope that everything could turn out alright in the end. And if he didn't believe him, then Will wouldn't know whether he could bring up enough will again to go on…

However, it had been Dr. Lecter who stopped him from jumping, who had given him new courage, who took his time to get through to him, who made him see his dogs. Will figured after a while, that if he couldn't tell this doctor now, after everything he'd done for him already, he would never tell this story again and he'd most certainly break over it.

"Do you…do you think I'm crazy, Dr. Lecter?", Will finally asked after some minutes of silence.

"This depends on how you'd define crazy", the doctor answered considerately. "As from what I can see, what you're telling and showing me about you and what I read in your medical records, there are no signs that actually would apply on the outdated medical definition of it. So no, I don't think you're crazy."

Hannibal eyed his patient up curiously, looking for an explanation why Will would consider himself as crazy. It was nothing unusual for someone with a history like his to suffer from things like panic attacks, depression, self-doubt, but he definitely wasn't crazy. The psychiatrist had experienced Will losing his track on reality a couple of times, but it wasn't as bad as bordering on delusion, because he only re-lived memories that had been haunting him for the biggest part of his life.

"I want you to hold this opinion still after I told you everything…", Will meant quietly, rolling on his back and staring on the ceiling. "I'm so afraid that…that you won't believe me."

"If you're not ready to talk about the things concerning your mother yet, we can delay this to next week", the doctor offered, but Will shook his head.

"I feel like…this is my last shot at it, you know? I want you to help me…", he said, sounding all desperate once more.

He felt that he could trust in Dr. Lecter. It had been so long since he actually felt safe to trust in someone. Even if he couldn't be sure that the doctor really believed him in the end, he still knew that he wouldn't just easily judge him. He was nothing like all the others and Will realized now, that Dr. Lecter had been right all along, when saying in his very first therapy session, that he was patient enough to wait for Will to tell him. Now Will hoped, that he also had been right, when claiming, that he knew he could provide the help he needed.

"I will help you, if you only let me", Hannibal said, remembering that he told him he'd not just abandon him, as others before him obviously did.

He had no intention in turning on him, if Will had something unusual to tell, that he probably wouldn't agree with, or didn't suspect, or seemed to sound crazy, as Will feared it would. However, he really wondered, what it might be that made his colleagues assume Will was delusional or imagining things to cope with the trauma that was caused to him, as it read in the records.

"Why do you assume that your father might have killed your mother?", he finally dared to ask the question that he'd been burning to get an answer to.

"She'd never just have left me behind", Will answered almost too quickly. That was something he'd told himself over and over and over again to calm himself down, not only as a kid.

"He hurt both of us before…a lot. Sometimes it were just bruises…other times we had to go to the ER, get some stiches or so…", Will started telling then, his voice was low, his gaze still directed at the ceiling, while he tried to force the pictures to the back of his head.

"He was so drunk sometimes, that he…he barely knew what he was doing. And they were always fighting…what I wanna say is, that it could easily have happened, that…he just beat her until…", he shook his head, unable to proceed from here.

"This is a very serious accusation you're making here", the doctor commented and Will sighed, because he obviously knew that.

"I've always wondered, why…why we didn't just run away…my mother and I", Will continued after a moment. "We could have gone far away, where he couldn't have found us… I don't know what kept her."

"Actually this is a very common reaction among victims of domestic abuse", the doctor explained to him. "It's hard to accept, that a beloved person would ever do such terrible things, so they try to persuade themselves, that it isn't that bad and that it will be over soon, that it will stop eventually…"

Will only nodded. Obviously, he wouldn't have understood something like that when he only was a kid. By now he could comprehend it, but he still found it rather absurd.

"That blood in the sink…it looked weird. Like someone had washed it off their hands, you know…I was only a kid, I was tired…I tried to make me believe that it was just from a nose-bleed or something…"

"When I woke up the other day, it was gone, but…I was standing there, staring in the mirror above the basin…and something real weird happened….", here Will stopped once more, trying to gather his thoughts, before finally giving away the cause that seemed to be the other reason besides his father, that his life had turned into a living hell, making him feel weird, crazy, like an outcast.

"I could see everything", he said in a low voice, that wasn't more than a whisper. "I could see him washing the blood off his hands…rubbing, rubbing until it finally was gone. I could see him…then I could…I knew his thoughts, he was distraught, panicked. But only for a moment…then he cooled down."

"You imagined your father after he'd hurt your mother?", the doctor asked, a bit confused.

"No…no, it wasn't like that. I didn't…yes, I imagined it, but I know it was real. It did happen like that…and it wasn't the only time I saw something like this that day. When I came down to the living room…where they always argued…I could see it all…I could see it and feel his rage…him beating her, hurting her, he gave her a punch at the side of the head and she…fell

down…and didn't get up again", here Will interrupted himself by breaking out in tears. He pressed his hands over his face, trying to calm down somehow but it didn't work.

"What is wrong with me? I know it was real…I didn't just imagine it because my mom left… I could feel what he was feeling…I could see what happened…I…I felt like I'd done it myself", he brought out, shaken by sobs. "I'm not crazy…I'm not."

# I believe you

Before the call came, Hannibal had spent the morning after Christmas doing nothing more but having a nice breakfast and reading a book. Well, trying to read it, to be accurate, because his thoughts kept wandering off to the conversation he'd had with Chilton's fiancé on Christmas Eve.

Alana Bloom. He knew, that he'd heard that name before and finally, as they'd long finished dessert and opened another bottle of wine, everyone a little tipsy already, Hannibal remembered.

Will had brought up that name just a day ago in his last therapy session, when he dared to talk about what had happened to his best friend in High School. Obviously Hannibal couldn't know if this was the same Alana Bloom, but hearing that very name in about two days got him a bit confused, to put it mildly. At least he could try to find out some more about her, and since everyone already had started asking her questions anyway, to get to know her better, he could as well dig a little deeper there.

In the end, he'd found out that Alana was born and raised here, had gone to High School and then had to leave for college. After finishing her studies with honors, she'd worked with the Behavioral Analysis Unit of the FBI in Quantico. She'd told them about it with ease, but nevertheless he didn't miss the tiniest of insecurities as she said she had to leave and never came back until now.

*"So, don't you have family around here anymore?", Hannibal wanted to know.*

*"No, they…my parents also moved, when I was at college", Alana explained, looking not quite at ease anymore in doing so.*

*"Yes, that's why tomorrow we drive to Boston to stay with Alana's parents over the holidays", Frederick threw in, making Alana smile and saved her from any more uncomfortableness.*

Her reactions only had been subtle, but Hannibal knew when to trust in his guts and also this time his assumption just screamed to be correct. Obviously he couldn't be completely sure, but he didn't quite know anyway how to process with this information.

Should he tell Will? What if he was wrong in the end? What if Will didn't even want to know? But if he didn't tell him, would he probably take a chance away from him to…to what? Speak with Alana? Try to get things straight? Could it actually help Will to know that he probably could see Alana again or would it be counterproductive? And what would Alana say if she found out? Did he even have the right to figure all these things out? Well, fact was, he did now. The remaining question was how to act on it, what to tell or not to tell?
But before he could indulge any longer in these thoughts, his phone rang and he could already guess that it would most certainly be work. He was on call today, so if one of his patients needed him, he'd be there.

It turned out to be Will. Another panic attack, according to the attending nurse. They'd give him a sedative, because he made the impression he could endanger himself or others.
As fast as he could, Hannibal grabbed his coat and keys, got in his car and set out for the hospital. He wouldn't have guessed that it would hit Will again this severely so soon, yet you could never quite predict when it came to these things. Still the doctor almost felt a little disappointed, when making his way through the city, there almost wasn't any traffic at this time, because everyone would be at home, having lunch.

He didn't even know why he suddenly felt kind of frustrated, because it was neither his, nor Will's fault that it happened again. Yet it felt like a step back, after his patient had done so exceptionally well only two days ago. But Hannibal obviously had known, that it could happen again at each time. There was so much more left that Will needed to process, they hadn't even properly started yet. And as Hannibal drove into the parking lot of the hospital, he knew how he'd deal with what he had found out about Alana.

Will had started to cry again, while Hannibal tried to process what he'd just told him. Never before he had worked with a patient like Will, yet the doctor already had sensed that this would be an interesting case, not like something he'd experienced before. He had read about countless syndromes and diseases and how they affected the patient. Here, however, he wasn't quite sure where to put Will. Hadn't he been diagnosed with a light form of Asperger's? Then why did he seemingly possess the ability to empathize with others as strongly as he'd just described? It seemed to be contradictory, they definitely would have to run some tests, when Will was able to do so again. However this seemed quite impossible at the moment, since he was completely drenched in tears shaking again, even despite the calmative.

"Will, listen to me", Hannibal said in a firm voice, not too forceful, however. He didn't want to startle him.

As his patient didn't really react to it, he put a hand on his upper arm, pressing it lightly, while leaning in to him a little.

"I believe you."

This simple statement seemed to have a great effect on Will, as he started to calm down almost immediately, trying to take a steady breath again. Hannibal gave him an encouraging smile, because he figured that this might be what Will needed now.

"I believe that you're not crazy", he meant then, his hand still resting on Will's arm. "There has to be an explanation to everything you just told me and I want to figure it out."
As if this case wasn't already holding enough explosiveness for both of them, now there also was a new unexplored medical factor to it, that Hannibal obviously was keen to find out about. Will already had been highly interesting before – and not just as a patient, as the doctor had to admit, even if he didn't really like it – but after his current revelation, everything about him seemed to be even more intriguing.

"You…you don't think I made it all up?", Will managed to ask dumbfounded, after he finally could stop his tears.

"No, I don't. You're neither crazy nor delusional. But there's something else about your mind, that hasn't been explored yet. Maybe it will never be fully understood, as the brain is a huge mystery of its own, but I'd like to try some tests and new therapy methods that could help us both understand", the doctor explained and finally took his hand back. Will seemed to have calmed down again.

"You believe me?", Will repeated, still flabbergasted, seemingly not able to express another thought just yet. He looked so disbelievingly at Hannibal, that under different circumstances the doctor almost had found it quite amusing and adorable.

"I do. There has to be an explanation that either couldn't be seen yet, or no one was willing to dig deep enough to see", Hannibal gave back, willing to find out what was going on with Will.

"Excuse me, I just…you don't think I'm crazy", Will brought out and started to laugh in disbelief. "You believe me…"

"I do", the doctor repeated, starting to grin a bit, because now Will actually was amusing him.

He seemed so relieved all of a sudden, so at ease, that nothing would hint on his nervous breakdown just minutes before. And Hannibal did understand him. It actually must be quite a relief to finally have found someone, who was willing to believe him, to not just put him away as delusional, give him some new medication and then leave him to deal with himself. No, Hannibal wouldn't do it like this. He saw so much potential not only in this case, but in Will himself.

There was this man, who wasn't even thirty yet, and still had to have experienced worse than other people do in a whole lifetime. No one had cared enough about him, or what he had to tell, that he actually was heard. They dealt with him, but they didn't hear him, they looked, but they didn't see. Hannibal wanted to change that, probably already had begun, judging by the fact that Will had trusted him enough to lay his last hope in him. There had to be a way to find out, what really happened, what ‘was wrong' with Will. And Hannibal didn't want to just let him down, because he'd already experienced this far too often.

"Why do you believe me, doctor?", Will asked after a moment, when he had contained himself again, finally sitting up in his bed and taking a sip of water.

"Because others didn't, yet you're still here, telling me what you believe to be the truth and I want to find out an explanation for all of it. There are some methods I already have in mind, however, I'll have to do some more research, before we can get started."

"What do you think is wrong with me?"

"I wouldn't put it like this. There doesn't essentially have to be something wrong with you, Will. But what I do assume so far is, that you might have been misdiagnosed", the doctor

explained, choosing his words carefully, because he actually could only assume right now that he basically didn't know where to put Will into.

"Okay…when do we get started?", he wanted to know and seemed to be honestly excited.

"Monday morning, the appointment is set. For now, you should really try to get some rest. You must be pretty tired, aren't you?", Hannibal asked and looked at his patient sympathetically.

"I don't know how…", Will sighed, running a hand over his face.

"Do you want me to get you some sleep inducing drugs?"

"No, they don't help", he declined, shaking his head as if to underline it.

"I'm…I'm so afraid of falling asleep. Because…every time I do, it all comes back to me… especially when I've talked about it before. And…I'm so glad right now, that…that you believe me", here Will stopped, hand running over his face once more. He looked as if he didn't get any sleep at all in a week.

There was a short silence between them and Hannibal tried to think of anything else he could offer to Will to make it easier for him to fall asleep. He couldn't promise him that his nightmares would stay away by just giving him sleeping pills, that was true. And if there was a medication that could make bad dreams go away, he'd already prescribed it to him. He let his gaze wander over Will's face, trying to find something to say that would cheer him up, or at least would make him feel better, but he couldn't give him much more than the perspective that they'd try to find out what was wrong as soon as possible.

"Doctor Lecter?", Will said after some more quiet moments and it sounded like a question.

"Yes, Will?", he replied, watching him fumbling with the edge of his blanket. He seemed to be quite nervous again, seemed to deliberate about whether to go on with what he wanted to say or not. Will averted his eyes, his hands still playing with the hem of the comforter.

"Would you…", he started but bit his lower lip then, which made Hannibal swallow hard, because it made him look really cute.

As soon as this thought had crossed his mind, obviously the doctor pushed it aside again, because this really wasn't the time nor the place for such thinking. Instead he gave Will an encouraging smile to go on, that he didn't notice, however, because his gaze was still directed on his fidgeting hands.

"I just wondered if maybe, uhm…", Will looked up for a moment, not meeting the doctor's eyes, before his view wandered back to the blanket.
"Could you maybe…stay with me?", he finally brought out, blushing strongly and not daring to look up.
"I mean…just until I fall asleep", he added quickly, flushing even harder.

This made Hannibal bite his lip and he couldn't push back the thought of Will being too adorable, because he clearly was. He knew that probably he should say no, because he wasn't his friend, he was his doctor. Yet it seemed to be almost impossible to decline this request. Maybe it would at least help him to not be so afraid of falling asleep.

"I'll stay right here", he finally gave back with a slight smile that Will returned, looking at him out of tired eyes.

"Thank you, doctor", he mumbled, leaning back into his pillows. Maybe he'd finally get some proper sleep, now that he'd found someone who believed him. Now that the doctor would watch over him, while he tried to get some much needed rest.

# Hypothetically speaking

Chapter Summary

thanks for reading :)

"Are you feeling fit today? We've got quite a lot of things to do", Dr. Lecter announced as soon as Will had taken his usual place in the leather chair in the doctor's office on Monday morning.

"It's okay, I got used to too less sleep by now", Will gave back, shrugging.

He hadn't slept too well the last few days, to be honest. But when was the last time he actually had got some proper sleep for a whole night? It weren't only his usual nightmares keeping him awake, but he was also nervous for the things to come, what would happen from now, that they seemed to be on the way to finally discover what it was that had plagued Will for years.

"When did you leave on Friday?", he added after a moment, because the only time he wasn't too disturbed by bad dreams recently, was when the doctor watched over him. It had been a too short time, however, because he'd woken up in the early evening, after getting a little restless in his sleep. It had just been a couple of hours and he found the chair next to his bed empty.

"I was invited to a dinner at a friend's that evening. So I left at 4:30pm, you seemed to be fast asleep by then, nothing seemed to trouble you", Dr. Lecter answered honestly, didn't manage to directly look at Will, however.

"You…stayed for almost three hours and watched me sleep?!", he asked, taken aback by the fact that the psychiatrist didn't just leave as soon as he had fallen asleep.

He was also a little bewildered, however, because he didn't quite appreciate the thought of someone watching him in his sleep. As long as he'd been quiet and not haunted by nightmares, however, he didn't find it too bad. And probably it was even the doctor's presence that had let him sleep in peace for once. On the other hand, it could as well have been the sedative that they'd induced him before. Anyway, he'd woken up around 5pm because something had troubled him again and the doctor hadn't been there by then anymore. So probably he could actually credit these couple of hours of undisturbed sleep to Dr. Lecter. Will wondered, if he could ask him again to stay with him once more, so he could get some proper rest for at least some short time, or if this was a silly idea. He wasn't a kid anymore after all.

"Yes, I just wanted to make sure, that you were alright", Dr. Lecter answered and it sounded as if he wanted to justify himself. Will noticed that and wanted to say something to take back his prior words that maybe had sounded accusatory.

"No…no, I meant…I didn't want to…", he stammered and had to take a deep breath, before he could go on. "I just…thank you. I could find some sleep thanks to you."

Will wondered for a moment, why he actually cared about making things clear. He didn't want to offend the doctor by his bewildered outburst. But why did he even care so much about what he could be thinking of him? Usually he didn't. He didn't even notice sometimes when he said something that could offend someone. So what was it that made Dr. Lecter different? Probably the fact that he cared for Will as well and he could tell it. Why would he have stayed with him the entire Friday afternoon, otherwise, just to make sure he slept well?

"I'm glad you did", the doctor answered with the tiniest of smiles, then went back to being all serious again.

"I have some things planned for you today", he added, before starting to explain the whole procedure to Will.

"You'll first have to answer some questionnaires, this should help me to categorize you better. But obviously it's not exhausting enough to be sure. So I'll have to ask you some more open questions later on, to get to know more about the way you interact with people and to try and find out how your brain is working."

This already sounded a lot to Will and he didn't quite like the perspective of having to repeat, what already had been done to him before. But he trusted Dr. Lecter to be actually better than his former psychiatrists and there also was nothing else left for him, than hoping that he could find out what was happening in his mind.

"Afterwards", the doctor continued then "I'll have to bring you up to neurology and we'll go on with our tests there."

"Why, what kind of tests will these be?", Will wanted to know. Neurology? That was new now.

"Yes, it's required that your brain activity is observed while you're going to watch some videos, look at pictures and answer some more questions. Like this, it will be possible for the neurologist and me to analyze your brain waves for any abnormalities", Dr. Lecter explained.

"Okay, I understand…", Will nodded. He didn't really like what he heard, but if it had to be.

"We'll try everything to help you", the doctor said to calm him down when sensing Will's light aversion.

"I know", he nodded again, not sounding too pleased. He didn't like to feel like he was some kind of guinea pig, but he definitely did so right now.

"Good. Then let's start", Dr. Lecter meant, handing him a questionnaire.

After answering what felt like a good fifty pages with questions – actually it were about ten – Will let fall the pen out of his hand and run it over his face instead. He already felt exhausted now, how was he supposed to go through all the other tests?

"Do you want to take a break?", the psychiatrist asked him, obviously noticing how depleted he was.
While Will had been answering the questionnaire, he'd been sitting in his chair, reading one of his books. Will wondered if it contained something helpful for his case, or if it was about something entirely else.

"Yeah, I guess…"

"Would you like to have a cup of coffee?"

"That would be nice", Will meant, sounding almost mechanically, but managed to smile tiredly.

"Did you find out anything yet? Are there any other cases like mine?", he wanted to know after he'd taken some sips of his coffee.

"There's none like yours, but symptoms can differ from case to case. I found some similar descriptions about a couple of patients. I'm already sure however, that whatever it is, that makes you experience what you told me about, is extremely rare and special", the doctor gave back, sipping on his coffee as well.

"But it can be explained, right? You can prove that I'm not hallucinating or anything?", Will went on asking, because it was the most important thing for him.

He'd been wondering forever what was going on with him. If there was something wrong with him and what it was. Whether he was crazy, or suffered from some illness, that made him see these things. If there's a treatment for it…

"There will be an explanation", Dr. Lecter said, smiling lightly to encourage him. "If you're ready, I'd like to go on with some more detailed questions now."
Will only nodded his approval.

"I'm so tired", Will sighed, after he'd been answering to the doctor for what felt like hours.

Actually it wasn't even time for lunch yet, but he didn't feel like he could go on with this weird question-answer game the psychiatrist pulled him through. Exhausted he rubbed his eyes and stretched his arms then, to relax his back muscles.

"We can postpone the neurologic tests until tomorrow, if you'd feel better about it", Dr. Lecter suggested, when seeing that Will barely could keep his concentration up anymore.

"Yeah, that sounds better", he meant, getting up of his chair and strolled through the room, over to the wide windows.

"How long will it take for you to analyze all the tests and get some results?", Will wanted to know then, his back turned to the doctor.

"It's a lot to consider. But in case I should find anything exceptional, I could still always contact some colleagues to help me out there. So I don't suspect it would take too long, I expect some first results for next week", the psychiatrist answered him and Will's only reply was nodding once more.
Hannibal sensed Will's frustration, even if he didn't express it. Probably he'd hoped to hear something else, that he'd already found out something. That he could already come up with an explanation and with a possible treatment as a solution. But obviously it wasn't this easy. Even less so when the brain was concerned, because it's presenting itself as a huge mystery over and over again. When musing about finding things out, Hannibal remembered Alana again. And what he'd decided to do about this topic.

"Will?", he said, sounding a little insecure, what usually wasn't one of his traits. But he just wasn't sure whether he was actually doing the right thing. Well, he could find out…

"Dr. Lecter?", Will asked back, turning around to look at him, a hint of confusion written on his face.

He'd never heard his doctor sound insecure, what did that mean? Would he tell him something devastating? That actually he thought he couldn't help him? That he knew what was wrong with Will, but there wasn't a cure? Or that it was so bad, that he didn't know whether or not to tell him? In the end, it was something entirely different, as Will should learn.

"Hypothetically speaking, now…if there was a chance for you to see your friend Alana again, would you want to?", the doctor wanted to know.
Will looked at him, puzzled. Where did that come from now? He'd expected everything, but this question really startled him for a moment.

"Why do you ask me that?", he wanted to know in return.

"Because I think talking about this particular topic could maybe be helpful for your recovery", the doctor said, not quite lying, rather talking himself out of telling the truth. He obviously had the plan that maybe a conversation with Alana could actually be of help for Will.

"I dunno where she is…so how would I be able to talk to her? I also don't have a plan, if she actually would wanna talk to me…", Will replied then.

He'd often asked himself this question. What if he could see Alana? Would she even want to talk to him? Would she even want to see him again, in the first place? He didn't know, what he would do, if there was a chance to and she said no. Because, to be completely honest, he'd

really love to see her again. Just to know how she was. To make sure she was alright now, to know what she did, if she was safe.

"Let's say she would like to see you, give you a chance to talk to her, what would you do?", Dr. Lecter mused.

"I'd want to see her as well…I'd really love to see her again", Will admitted, sighing, because he knew it wasn't possible.

"What would you tell her?"

"I'd…I'd tell her that I'm sorry for what happened…I didn't want anything of this to happen…", Will started, his voice breaking then, however.

"None of this was your fault, Will", the doctor tried to reassure him. "You couldn't know."

"I'm still feeling kinda responsible for it…I don't know…maybe if I actually got the chance to tell her, she'd…she'd tell me that I'm wrong…that it wasn't my bad. But as she cannot tell me, I cannot stop thinking that this happened because of me…", he went on, finding it extremely hard to speak.

He'd been blaming himself all those years. His father wouldn't have known about Alana, if he hadn't brought her home. Then he couldn't have assaulted her and she wouldn't have moved away, breaking off all contacts to him. He wouldn't have lost his best and only true friend…

"Would you feel better if you could talk to her? Do you think it could help you?"

"It could help me, if she told me, that she…she doesn't blame me. But I guess if she told me anything different from that…I wouldn't know how to cope with that…", Will answered honestly and sighed once again.

Why did they even have to talk about hypothesis? Alana was god knows where and he hadn't talked to her in about a decade. He wondered, if he'd even recognize her, if she'd pass by him randomly on the street. Why should he think about what he'd tell her, if he couldn't anyway?

"I cannot longer think about that…what I'd say to her…when I cannot actually do that", he meant then, shaking his head as if to underline this statement.

"Maybe you could", Hannibal answered, feeling safe enough to come out with the truth. It seemed a lot like it would be a great opportunity for Will, it could help him. If only Alana agreed…

"What do you mean?", Will asked, baffled.

"I might find a possibility for you to see Alana again", the doctor finally dared to admit and rendered Will completely speechless.

# New Year's Eve

Chapter Notes

Hey guys :)
that's the last full chapter I've written so far, but I already started with the 20th, so...probably I can post that one in a couple of days then. Until then...Happy New Year! :)

It was December 31st and Will had been staying in the psychiatric hospital for almost three weeks at this time. By now, he was doing way better, than when he first was admitted here. At least he didn't feel the urge to end his life anymore, because he couldn't stand it otherwise. He wasn't all that desperate and helpless anymore. Of course he wasn't cured just yet, there was still way to go, but for the moment, he seemed to be stable.

The nights were still the worst, though, his nightmares kept on haunting him, but Dr. Lecter assumed, it was only this bad recently, because Will was talking about and focusing a lot on it and during the night, his mind was trying to cope with it, processing it.

But there was a lot more on Will's mind the last days, not only all the things that have come up from his past again. Also his current state, since his psychiatrist had already managed to evaluate one of the tests. It clearly showed, that he suffered from some symptoms that could be ascribed to Asperger's, yet he didn't completely fit this profile, because there were some obvious contradictions, that weren't quite clear to his doctor yet. So Will had to wait and look out for the whole evaluation of all the tests he'd undergone in the last couple of days.

More than once, there had been electrodes connected to his head, or he was put into some MRI to see, what was going on in his brain while he was answering the doctor's questions, or looked at pictures and videos. This morning he'd done the last questionnaires, completely annoyed afterwards, because he didn't see why he was supposed to give answers to all these questions. Then Dr. Lecter had cancelled their afternoon session, where Will actually would have been supposed to just talk, but the psychiatrist was holding the opinion, that Will needed some rest. He'd done enough the last few days, so he should get some distraction instead and they'd go on with their next session after New Year's Day.

Will's distraction was drawing, as always. He didn't know what else to do and this was the only thing, where all the bad thoughts were kept off of his mind. He couldn't talk to Abigail, because she wasn't here anymore. She'd been discharged the day before and only was supposed to come around twice a week now, for her therapy sessions with Dr. du Maurier.

To be honest, Will found it pretty boring without the girl's company. They'd become fast friends, in opposition to Will usually not making friends that easily. But she'd suffered through similar things and this seemed to connect them somehow. Before she had left the

hospital, she even had been as far in her therapy, as she finally could tell Will about some things that happened and had caused her all this pain.

Her father was mentally ill, schizophrenic, and during an episode, where he didn't know anymore what he actually was doing or who he even was, he had stabbed her mother with a knife. She couldn't be saved anymore and her father was brought into preventive custody for the rest of his life.

When Abigail had told him her story, Will had felt something like pity for her. He couldn't always tell what he was feeling himself, mostly is was anger, anxiety, angst. But obviously he was really sorry for the girl, that her family had been ripped apart in such a gruesome way. He could feel her hurt, though, her anger, and it was pretty similar to his own, about his fate.

Another thing, that occupied his thoughts a lot recently, was his old friend Alana. Dr. Lecter had told him, that he might be able to arrange for them to meet again and talk, if Will wished so and Alana agreed. Obviously he had said yes, although he was terrified of her reaction to seeing him again. If she even wanted to come and meet him. And he also still wondered, how the doctor would arrange such a meeting. How did he know where Alana was? Will had meant to ask him about it, but he just hadn't found time to do so during all the tests he had to get through. So he would have to wait at least until Friday to do so, because he wouldn't see Dr. Lecter again earlier.

Though, he wished he did. Not just because he wanted to ask him all about Alana: How and where he found her, if she wanted to see him, when…but also did he feel somehow lonely, now that Abigail was gone. He'd realized during the last weeks, that it didn't seem all too bad for him to have some contact, conversations with other people for a bit during the day. It seemed to help him not to be all alone in his room all the time. Even if he didn't like to talk much, just sitting together with Abigail had made him feel better. Just as sitting together with Dr. Lecter always seemed to soothe him.

Will really didn't appreciate, that the doctor had cancelled their appointment for the afternoon, because then at least he would have had something meaningful to do. And talking to his psychiatrist always calmed him somehow, because he did understand him. More than all the others ever had. And he helped him more than anyone ever had so far. Also he actually enjoyed his company. He was probably the only person, Will could take along while walking his dogs, without being annoyed to not be left alone. While thinking about this, he felt himself wishing, that Dr. Lecter would pick him up again, to go to the shelter and take a walk with Winston and Wesley.

But obviously he couldn't always expect the doctor to do this for him, he also had to look for his other patients. And he already had done so much for him, including staying with him once more, the other afternoon, until he could finally fall asleep and get some well needed rest. Probably he'd have collapsed due to his constant lack of sleep otherwise.
For a moment, Will wondered, if he should ask a nurse to make a quick appointment for him with the doctor just now, like it was an emergency that he needed to talk to him about something real urgently. Then again, he didn't have a panic attack or anything threatening, for which he was grateful. He actually realized after another while of considering that he simply was bored. Probably he should rather go and look for some company of any of the other

patients here, than wishing he had another one of his episodes just so that he could talk to the doctor.

But he decided against, he didn't want the company of Beth or Tom or even Franklyn, they all kind of annoyed him after a short while. He'd appreciate if it was possible for him to talk to Abigail, because she didn't bore and annoy him that easily. The problem was, that it just wasn't possible, because she was staying at her grandparents' with some friends for NYE, at least she'd told him so the other day.

Will would like the company of Dr. Lecter. Not necessarily to talk, although it was effortless talking to him, he also enjoyed just sitting with him in comfortable silence. All Will wanted, was not feeling lonely. He often wanted and needed to be alone, because the presence of people usually got on his nerves way too easily. However, he didn't like to feel lonely. With Dr. Lecter, he didn't. They could just sit, quietly and Will cherished this a lot, because he could talk, if he wanted to, but there wasn't a need to. And the doctor would neither pressure him into having a conversation, nor annoy or bore him by talking too much himself.

Sighing, Will put away the pencil, as he noticed, that he'd rather been thinking about Abigail and Dr. Lecter than drawn anything at all for the last half an hour or so. When looking out of the window, it already was growing dark outside. So soon it would be time for dinner.

Dinner. Best he stayed on his own, he figured, since he couldn't spent it with Abigail anymore and he really didn't feel like sitting with anyone else. Beth always was too loud and talkative for his likes, while Franklyn would always find something he could bellyache about, like the meat was too raw, the potatoes too overcooked, the carrots tasted too much like oil. He still didn't know that elderly lady very well and also didn't feel the need to get to know to her, so the only person he would probably sit with, was Tom, because he didn't go on talking for hours. Tom just always was with Beth and so Will rather decided to take a place on a table afar from the others.

Later that evening, Will tried to watch some dull TV show, where they counted the hours and seconds to New Year, to distract himself, but he didn't even pay attention to what they were saying. He rather wondered, whether he could see the fireworks from his window, but he doubted so, because knowingly, nothing much lay in that direction of the town, that he could observe from his hospital room window. There were only some factories and industrial buildings. It all would be on the other side. He'd always liked seeing the fireworks on New Year’s Eve, though. Obviously he could just stay in his room and watch the Ball Drop in New York City, but he never found it as interesting as looking at the dark night sky himself, seeing all the bright and colorful lights illuminating it. When trying to figure out, from where he could best observe the fireworks, he soon found out a place, where it definitely would be possible. He just didn't know how to get there, because it certainly wouldn't be allowed. But he didn't care about that at all. He'd nothing else to do, so he went on about his plan to watch the fireworks at midnight…

"Mr. Graham, what do you think you're doing here?! You're not allowed to be here, it's also the middle of the night!", the voice of his favorite – or rather most annoying – nurse cut

through the comfortable silence, that spread out around him outside on the flat rooftop of the hospital.

Sighing, he turned to face her. It was 18 minutes before midnight, why couldn't she just leave him alone? It had been so peaceful here before and not even too cold for standing outside at this time of the year…

"I am watching the fireworks", he stated, not looking directly at the nurse's indignant expression.

"You could do that like everyone else from inside, or just watch it on TV!", she almost screamed at him and he grimaced, because he just couldn't stand when someone was yelling at him.

"But I cannot see it from my room…and TV is boring", Will explained and sounded as bored as he found the idea of seeing a New Year's firework only on TV.

"You cannot stay here!...you tried to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge, how did you even get here?!", she went on ranting and Will just turned away, because he didn't like her screaming, it hurt him in the ears.

Instead of answering, Will walked even a little closer to the edge – but he didn't have any dark intentions now. He just sat down there, looking over the yellow city lights. Some few people already had started their fireworks early, as always and he could hear the distant sound of firecrackers exploding.

"Leave me alone", he replied, pretty annoyed, as the nurse went on ranting, that he couldn't be here and that he should get up and go inside again.

"I don't care", Will just said neutrally, as she told him to get up, because it was too cold. He really didn't care. All he wanted, was being left alone, in silence, he just wanted to watch the fireworks, nothing more. He didn't pay more attention to the nurse and checked his watch instead: 15 minutes to midnight.

For a moment, the nurse's ranting stopped, then she seemed to call someone on the phone. Will sighed once more, but didn't care at all. He didn't intend to jump or hurt himself. What bad did he do by just being outside here for some more minutes to enjoy the start of the New Year?

In the next couple of minutes, the nurse didn't try to persuade him anymore that he had to go inside again. Actually, she had walked back inside herself, standing at the door and seemingly waiting for someone.

It was four minutes before midnight, when Will heard a new pair of footsteps walking up behind him, while more and more people couldn't hold back with lighting their pyro techniques.

"Don't you think it's a bit too cold for sitting on the floor like that?", Dr. Lecter wanted to know and as Will turned around, he could clearly see the amusement on his face. It actually

surprised him a bit, that the doctor wasn't also mad at him, but he really appreciated that.

"It's okay. I've got my coat", he only answered.

"You should get up anyway, unless you want to catch a cold", the psychiatrist replied, all calm as ever.

"But I want to stay here, just until I've watched the fireworks", Will made clear, whilst he picked himself up and brushed off the snow from his clothes. Probably it actually hadn't been the best idea to sit down, but it didn't matter to him now.

"So, that's why you came up here?", the doctor asked curiously and looked him over.

"Yeah, that's all…I didn't…I don't want to end my life anymore", Will replied, directing his gaze back to the sky above the town, where mostly bright red, white and green sparkles became more and more frequent.

"No?"

"No…", he clarified, then the next words came out of his mouth, before he could over-think them again. "That changed, because of you."

Will could feel his cheeks turn hot against the cool night air and felt Dr. Lecter's gaze on him, but didn't intend to turn around. He kept his look fixed on all the fireworks, and before the doctor had a chance to give back anything, finally midnight approached and the big fireworks started all over the city, turning the black sky bright and gay.

For some moments, both Will and his psychiatrist were standing side by side on the rooftop in silence, gazing into the colorful sky, enlightened by thousands of blazing and glistening lights. Everywhere fireworks were lighted and the rattling sound of a million explosions spread out all around them.

"Happy New Year, Will", Dr. Lecter broke their silence then and Will could almost feel his wide smile, although he still hadn't turned to meet his gaze.

As Will finally managed to look at him, Hannibal felt something tear inside his chest, as the younger man mirrored his smile. Only then, in the light of all the fireworks above their heads, he could make out, that Will's lips already had turned blue from the cold. They should get inside, but he also didn't want to ruin the moment for both of them. Because the next thought, that crossed his mind, was that he'd really like to hug him. To keep him warm and safe.

"May I…give you a hug?", he asked Will, almost coyly, which wasn't an emotion he was familiar with. It was New Year's, it definitely wasn't weird to hug, even if this wasn't Hannibal's prior intention. He still was thankful, though, that he could mask it as just this and nothing more.

Will stared at him for a moment, his smile fading first, but then re-appearing again, as he gave him a small nod of approval.

"Happy New Year, Dr. Lecter", Will mumbled against his neck, his chin resting on Hannibal's shoulder, as he wrapped his arms around Will, pulling him closer, whilst the tugging in his chest even seemed to intensify.

# Right or wrong

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, I'm still there :)

I'm sorry for not posting anything for months. This was probably the longest hiatus I ever took on any story of mine. In the meantime I was really busy writing papers for school and other pretty important rl stuff.

But watching the Hannibal season (and probably series?) finale yesterday totally inspired me to keep on writing this story! I almost forgot how much I enjoy working on it and that I really, really love this story and actually I have everything that's gonna happen planned out since a long time, I just need to get it out of my mind :D so I hope I can continue updating every once in a while (and not just twice a year or so :D)

oh and please don't be too harsh on me if m writing style still sucks a little atm compared to earlier chapters, I've been only writing academical papers recently and this style is an absolutely horrible influence on creative writing...

The new year was still young when Will was supposed to have his next therapy session where he hopefully would get some answers about his medical condition. He finally needed to know why those visions would occur to him, why these things kept haunting him. Will felt he needed this in order to get better. He couldn't go on like that anymore, it just was too much not knowing for such a long time what it was, that made him different, that made him seem insane, that made him believe himself that he had a screw loose.
Maybe it could give him a chance for closure eventually, because he felt that he couldn't stand just one more of these nightmares that still kept him awake most nights. It's been five days since his last therapy session, since the last time he had to talk about what happened when he was a child, but in the meantime his mind never shut down. All the memories came up relentlessly when he least expected them to.

But he wasn't quite as hopeless anymore now as he used to be. He believed that Doctor Lecter could help him, he'd proven that already and he trusted him to find the answers to this most troubling of all questions. Even if by now, Will actually had stopped assuming that he really was crazy, there still was this last doubt that made him wonder but what if?
Yet he tried not to think about this too much and rather shifted his thoughts back on the upcoming session. Would the doctor have evaluated some more test by now? Could he finally rightfully diagnoze him and then figure out a way to make him get better? Would he finally be able then to find out, what actually happened to his mother?
But then he started to get these anxious feelings again, because did he even actually want to know all that? What if he couldn't be treated? What if it only got worse in the end? What if…

Thankfully all these grim thoughts were disrupted by a knock on his door, followed by a nurse stepping in.

“Hello, Mr. Gaham“, she said kindly and he managed to return her greeting without sounding as angsty as he’d just started to feel again.

“I’m just here to inform you that Doctor Lecter won’t be working today. So your therapy session had to be rescheduled for tomorrow morning at 9:30am“, she explained without any further ado.

“But why?“, he wanted to know, feeling as if someone had just punched him in the guts.

He’d actually been looking forward to that session, he’d been waiting for it for the past five days. And it also has been four days again since he last saw the doctor on New Years Eve, when they both were standing on the rooftop of the hospital, watching the fireworks.

As Will had figured out the day that Doctor Lecter had spent the afternoon watching over him while he tried to get some sleep, he always felt a little better just being around his psychiatrist. He didn’t only make him feel understood but also safe in a way that no one else managed to make him feel in what seemed like forever. And that was exactly what he needed right now, because it seemed far too long ago since he last embraced that sense of peace that being around Doctor Lecter brought him.

“He called in today and said he’s indisposed, that’s all I can tell you“, the nurse replied, but Will guessed that she wouldn’t have told him otherwise even if she knew better.

“Okay“, he just nodded, while the nurse already turned to leave, before she seemed to remember soemthing else.

“Oh right, and he told me to suggest to you, that in case you absolutely needed to talk to a psychiatrist today and couldn’t wait until tomorrow, you’re free to go and see Doctor du Maurier in his stead.“

“I don’t wanna see another psychiatrist“, Will opposed immediately, because he really didn’t feel the need for it. On the one hand, he didn’t want to talk about everything that plagued him to yet another doctor, plus he didn’t even know her. And on the other hand, the only person he really wanted to talk to was Doctor Lecter.

“Good, then you’ll see Doctor Lecter tomorrow“, she meant and finally left him alone again.

As soon as she closed the door, Will went back to his bed and just let himself slump on top of it. So, there was another day for him to face without either seeing Abigail or his doctor and they were the only two people he liked enough to be around for longer than the time he needed to take his meals. Since he didn’t feel up to drawing, reading or even watching some dull TV show, he didn’t really know what to do with himself. Boredom was his worst enemy at the time. If he didn’t have anything or anyone to keep himself occupied with, his thoughts kept wandering and ended up in corners that he rather didn’t want to explore any further if he could avoid it.

At least he’d already taken his medication this day, because that helped him to feel a tiny bit better. Doctor Lecter finally seemed to have found the right dosage. Instead of letting his mind get him into all the dark places again, he kept his thoughts on the doctor. The nurse had said he was indisposed. So hopefully he would feel better the next day to come in for work again, because after that lonely weekend Will had just passed, he really couldn’t stand another of these days where he literally had nothing to do but wondering what it was that the test results would tell them about him.

And if he was being quite honest, by now he really enjoyed the time he could spent with the doctor, because he didn’t annoy or bore him. He never talked to him as if he didn’t take him seriously and he never gave him the impression that he thought Will was crazy indeed. He even made him engage in actual conversations and made talking to him enjoyable, because it wasn’t just the usual question and answer game he had endured with all his former doctors.

Apart from Doctor Lecter being really deliberate and thoughtful, he probably was the best person he’d ever met so far in his life. Will knew the benign way the psychiatrist treated him wasn’t naturally, but for the doctor it seemed to be. Not everything he did was absolutely necessary, not when it only came to his payroll at the end oft hey day. Yet everything he did for Will wasn’t only incredibly benevolent, but almost affectionate and Will knew that he should be endlessly greatful to have come upon someone who really seemed to care. Of course he’d also already wondered why Doctor Lecter treated him like he did, but in the end, he didn’t really want to question it.
While thinking about his psychiatrist and hoping that he’d see him again for therapy the next day, Will drifted away in a light, but dreamless sleep.

OOOOOO

Meanwhile Hannibal didn’t feel as indisposed as he pretended he was. To be honest, it had only been an excuse to avoid going to work that day, because he had something else planned. Something that he really needed to do, and that couldn’t be suspended any longer in order to try and help Will get better.

Obviously Hannibal knew exactly how wrong his behaviour was. He couldn’t and shouldn’t just fake being ill and then go off doing a job that wasn’t his to do in the first place. He shouldn't be talking to Alana Bloom about Will and try to make her meet him so that he could possibly feel better afterwards. He shouldn't interfere in someone else's life without their permission. Of course, he had asked Will whether he'd like to have the chance to talk to Alana and he hadn't rejected that idea.

Hannibal just wanted the best for Will and he thought he was acting in his best interest when he drove up to Boston to meet Alana who had prolonged her visit with her parents in contrast to Frederick who already went back to work.

Obviously he was aware of the fact, that he wouldn't do that for any patient, but he was long past the point of debating whether his intentions and actions where wrong or right. Since he'd spent New Year's Eve on the rooftop of the hospital with Will, he was completely sure that he was in too deep. That he always has been, maybe right from the start.
Probably he shouldn't even have taken Will's case, that would have been in their both favour. But after lying wide awake for the last two nights, he almost believed his own made up

excuses, that everything he did was for Will and for Will only. He would never try what he was about to do if he had any doubt that it could cause Will's process of healing any trouble or that it would hurt him in any way. Hannibal wasn't careless, he was one of the best in his field and he knew of the benefits and positive influences a resolving chat with Doctor Bloom could have on his patient. So he'd try everything he could to persuade her to be a help for Will's recovery.

He met Alana for an afternoon coffee in a small café in Boston. When she arrived, Hannibal already waited at a table in the back of the tiny shop, so that not everybody could just catch up on what they'd be talking about.

"Good afternoon, Alana", Hannibal greeted her, politely as ever and put away the neuroscience magazine he'd been reading in.

"Hello, Hannibal, I didn't think I'd see you again this soon", she said, stepping ouf of her coat and taking the seat opposite him.

"I'm glad you could make it, it was really considerate of you agreeing to meet me about a consultation for one of my patients", Hannibal said. He'd called the other day and asked if she possibly could help him out with one of his patients. Obviously he didn't tell her yet that it was Will he was talking about.

"It's actually a pleasure being able to work with you", Alana smiled, taking a sip of the coffee she just ordered.

"Well, then let's cut to the case: I haven't been quite honest with you on the phone", he started to explain then, while Doctor Bloom raised an eyebrow, but continued listening.

"This is not about a consultation I need on this case. Although I'm not quite sure about this patient's psychical evaluation yet, because I haven't finished all the tests. The thing is, I just need you to meet him. I need you to talk to him, because I think it would help him progress", Hannibal meant.

"And why do you think that me talking to him would be helpful for your patient? What do you think I could do or see that you didn't?", Alana wanted to know a little skeptically.

"He's not just any patient. I'm sorry that I haven't been frank with you from the start, but I need you to hear me out", he replied, Doctor Bloom just nodded for him to go on, while eyeing him curiously.

"My patient's name is Will Graham."

For a moment, Alana just stared at him, as if she wasn’t quite sure what she’d just heard.

"Will?!", she finally managed to get out and sounded surprised, to put it mildly.

Actually she almost shattered her cup of coffee and looked at Hannibal as if he just came back from the dead.

"So, you do remember him", he needlessly observed.

"Of course, I do...", Alana tried to pull herself together, but she still seemed to be a little in shock.

"He was...we went to High School together. He was my best friend...", she told, her eyes zooming out of focus, as if she just remembered these times, which she probably did.

"Will told me about you, your story. Why you stopped being friends and you moved away for college", Hannibal added, waiting for her reaction to this.

"Why is Will your patient? What happened to him?", she wanted to know then, seemingly ignoring what he just said.

"He's not your patient, you're aware that I can't enlighten you about his state. And it wouldn't be wise for me either to actually put you on his case. I just need you to talk to him. You should see him and ask him yourself, maybe he will tell you what happened to him", Hannibal replied and he knew it wasn't quite fair of him to bait her like that, but he really wanted Will to have this chance of talking to her.

"So, would you like to see him again, Alana?"

# Mirror neurons

Chapter Notes

Hey guys!
first of all, thank you so, so much for reading! the amount of hits I got in this story is absoluetly incredible and I'm so glad and happy about each and every one of you who's still sticking with that story, or who's new on board, so thanks :)

this chapter was kinda hard to write because I didn't quite know how I wanted to do it...I even had a chance to let Hannibal turn evil, eventually. But then I realized again, that this isn't what I wanted for this story. It's about Will and his struggles and not about Hannibal being a bad guy...I just wanted him to be a good guy here, so I hope you understand that and if you want to you can let me know what you think :)

Also it was tough writing because of all the psychological stuff, I did some research, but I'm neither a psychology or medicine student nor do I have any experience in the field of psychiatry, so in case I got anything wrong (some things are also just fiction obviously) I'm really sorry, I don't want to disrespect anyone or anything!

now, have fun with this chapter :)

Will was beyond exhausted when he sat in the aisle outside of Dr. Lecter's office the next morning. Once more he had to live through a sleepless night, after he'd been startled out of a particularly gruesome nightmare. He wasn't quite sure, however, if it was only a nightmare or real memories from his past.

Because his father beating him and his mother up wasn't something he wasn't used to. Just this time, he was actually watching how his father killed his mom and then disposed of her lifeless body. Though, it also was nothing like those visions he'd had before. He didn't feel like he'd murdered his mother himself, he couldn't feel all the uncontrollable rage. So maybe, maybe, it really just was a nightmare this time.

At first he didn't even notice when the psychiatrist called his name to let him know that it was his turn for the session now, because he was so engrossed in these thoughts. So he only got pulled out of the dark, when a warm hand settled lightly on his shoulder.

"Will? Are you with me?", Dr. Lecter's voice finally ripped him out of his dreadful memories.

"Yeah…yeah, I am", he managed to say after a moment and finally could focus, as he looked at his doctor who'd taken the seat beside him.

“Hey“, the other man simply said, his face seemingly relaxing as he noticed that Will would be alright for now.

“Hey“, Will replied and it wasn’t even hard to mirror the tiny smile that had crossed the doctor’s lips, because he could almost feel the darkness in his mind lighten now that Dr. Lecter was around. Or maybe he only imagined that and it was just the fact that the doctor had disrupted the stream of black horrors that flooded his brains.

“I guess we should continue our talk inside my office, don’t you think? I’ve got some quite interesting news for you“, Dr. Lecter said then and held the door open for Will to step inside.

When they’d settled down in their usual places on the black leather chairs, Will seemed to have forgotten all his fatigue and everything that bothered him before, now he was just curious for answers.

“Did you get around to evaluate the tests?“, he wanted to know, looking at the doctor expectantly.

“Yes, indeed. I managed to find some more insights that your former psychiatrists didn’t think about, because they were so eager to put your case away with the most common explanation they could get. Although, to be fair, I have to admit that what I concluded might be a wide guess for a lot of my colleagues“, Dr. Lecter started explaining.

“It’s true that you’re showing some signs that can be ascribed to the diagnosis of Asperger’s. But there’s this ability of yours, that completely contradicts with this.“

“What ability?“, Will questioned. “The reason why I had these vision of what my father did?“

"Exactly. There isn’t a lot of research about this yet. So far they only found out little about the function of mirror neurons when it comes to the human brain and most tests just involve macaques. But they’re believed to have an influence on the way we perceive empathy. And as for you, it's possible that your mirror neurons are extraordinarily developed. Like nothing we've ever seen before. This gives you the gift of pure empathy", Dr. Lecter went on explaining, sounding almost thrilled. Probably because his findings were indeed so incredibly special.

"What does this mean, how does this affect me?", Will asked, a little bewildered. He didn't want to turn into some guinea pig, just because his case seemed to be extraordinary. All the tests he already had to undergo were enough for a lifetime and if it wasn’t absolutely necessary, he really didn’t want to do any more of them.

"It gives you the ability to feel what other people feel. Almost as if it were your own emotions. It seems like it occurred to you rather sporadically so far. But it is believed, that if there was a way for you to understand how to use this gift...you could possibly read other people's minds, quite literally", the doctor explained.

"I...I don't wanna do any of this. And how, how does it even explain, that most of the time, I don't seem to understand people at all?", Will meant and sounded unable to cope. He didn't quite get how this evaluation should fit him, because at first sight, it didn't really. And mind-

reading? That definitely wasn’t something he was eager to do at all, the bare thought of it rather freaked him out.

"That's the contradiction. The paradox, if you like. You appear to have a pervasive developmental disorder. Some of the criteria that fits on this profile also fits for Asperger's, but unlike that, it isn’t part of the autism spectrum, because it doesn’t come with quite as severe social and also mental inabilities. That's what your other psychiatrist could have seen, but they failed you, because it seemed to have confused them. Or they were just looking for an easy way to explain the paradox your brain is offering", Dr. Lecter finished and sounded quite pleased with himself, which Will didn’t appreciate. He didn’t want to be some fascinating medical case. He just wanted to find out the truth about his father.

"I don't want to turn in your guinea pig", was his defensive and also a little angry reply to that.

For a moment, Dr. Lecter just stared at him, he probably didn't expect this response or the hostile tone in Will's voice. Actually he’d thought that Will would be relieved in some way, because there finally was some explanation for what was going on with his mind.

"When did I ever do or expect anything from you that you didn't want to do?", he asked after a while and looked Will directly in the eye for a little while, until he quickly avoided his gaze again.

Will didn't have to answer this, the question was clearly rhetorical and he knew it. Actually he didn’t think that the psychiatrist would use him like that after everything he already did for him, although he really didn’t have a reason to do so.

"You're remarkable, Will. Not only your brain. But I won't use you to satisfy my professional thirst. I've always said that I wanted to help you and that's what I do. Everything I figured out about you so far, I use to help. I promise you that I won't expect you to participate in any tests that aren't of any use for your recovery", Hannibal said and felt like he needed to justify himself, although he never intended to put Will through more trouble just because he was the most outstanding patient he probably ever had treated so far in his career. He wouldn't and couldn't do this to him, not because he wasn't interested in him enough, but because he was invested in him too much.

"So...that means, this disorder, combined with my exceptional talent to perceive empathy makes me...who I am?", Will asked unsure.

It sounded somehow logical, but on the other hand it seemed to him like some weird stuff a sci-fi author could have made up. But he trusted Doctor Lecter with his evaluation. He already proved to be the best doctor he ever had so far. If he couldn’t help him, then probably no one could.

"I wouldn't put it quite like that. You're far more than this. But...this is the recipe for the exceeding amount of empathy you’re able to experience and your anxiety", the doctor corrected him with a little smile.

"Okay, but how can we treat it?“

“There’s medication that patients with pervasive developmental disorder can get prescribed, that could help with the anxiety and aggression you’re experiencing. But it won’t heal you, obviously. You will always have difficulties in understanding social situations. While at the same time those visions, as you called them, might still occur to you, given the exceptional development of your mirror neurons“, his psychiatrist explained further, already sensing that this wasn’t quite what his patient wanted to hear.
In a way, that wasn’t what Will had expected. He’d hoped for something more. Probably a treatment, that could make him feel normal again. And not some “gift“, that made him seem like an even bigger freak.

“But do you think, that…if, if there was a way to get hold of…how this thing works, perceiving empathy…do you think I could find out the truth about what my father actually did?“, he then dared to ask, because that’s what he really wanted to know most. That’s the only real answer he was looking for, that he’s been looking for for almost twenty years.

“That’s what’s bothering you the most, isn’t it?“, Hannibal asked instead of just answering his question, because if he was being quite honest, he didn’t really know the answer himself.

“Yeah...I mean, yeah. I just…I need to know what happened that night, don’t you understand? I think, that maybe…if I just….if I just finally knew that what I saw was true, then…then I could move on. Get some peace. Get justice for my mom…“, Will brought out incoherently, because he didn’t really know yet what to make of these new information.

“So, is there a way to control it?“, he went on asking, sounding almost desperate once more.

“I honestly don’t know, Will. I’m afraid, there is nothing but mere speculation about this so far. Obviously I do understand your desire for answers. But as so far, I cannot figure out, how I could help you when it comes to these questions, I’m sorry“, Hannibal had to admit and Will only nodded, because knew he meant it.

“I…I understand…I mean, I don’t even know where my father currently is. He might not even be alive anymore…“, he said after some quiet moments. This was actually a thought that bothered him a lot. How would he ever be able to prove anything if he couldn’t get a hold of his father?

"How are you feeling now, Will? Do you think you could deal with some more new information?“, Hannibal wanted to know then, because he didn’t just want to throw the fact that he talked to Alana Bloom out into the room and then leave Will to deal with it, if he maybe couldn’t stand it right now.

“What is it about?“

“Your past. I stumbled upon something…someone, who might be helpful for your moving on. Give you at least some little peace of mind“, the doctor only hinted.

“What are you talking about?“, Will inquired and really wished the doctor wouldn’t always tend to this cryptic way of expression.

“Do you remember me asking you if you’d like to have the chance to talk to Alana Bloom again?“, he helped him along then.

Will just stared at him for a couple of seconds at this announcement. No, that couldn’t be. Dr. Lecter couldn’t have found Alana and made her talk to him, could he? How would he have? Will didn’t even know her whereabouts himself, he hadn’t for the past ten years or so, so how would his psychiatrist just find her in the matter of days?

“You didn’t…“, he said unbelievingly and almost shocked. This might actually be a little too much. Did he even want to see Alana now? What would he even say? What would she say? How’d she react to him being in a mental hospital?

“How?“, he just asked, shaking his head a little in disbelief.

“I met her through a friend. At first I didn’t realize it was your Alana, but then, the more she told us about herself, it dawned on me. It could have been just a coincidence, but not with everything she said. It had to be her…so I met her and asked her about you“, Dr. Lecter finally explained.

“What did she say?“, he wanted to know immediately.

“She really wants to see you again“, Hannibal said neutrally. He didn’t admit that she agreed on meeting Will instantly, although she too seemed to be in some kind of shock about that prospect.

“I can’t believe that…“, Will only mumbled, putting a hand over his face and shaking his head again, still unbelieving.

“Do you want to see her, too?“

# What do you see?

Chapter Notes

Hey, I'm already back with the next chapter, guys! :)
somehow writing went easier these days and I also somehow want to make it up to you that you had to wait for ages in between...but you're lucky that I can actually already upload this one, because I almost deleted half of it again, since I totally wasn't sure if I already wanted to go there yet...but you'll see what I mean by just reading, so have fun ;)
p.s. thank you all SO much for reading, the kudos and comments, you're awesome!

It was taking Will a while to agree on meeting Alana. Of course he wanted to see her, that wasn't even the question. He was just really scared of meeting her again after all this time. It's been more than ten years after all. So much has changed, not only between them, but also for them. Will was a patient in a psychiatric hospital with an extremely rare condition, who claims to have experienced his father killing his mother and on top of that, he still wasn't fully over his depression that got him institutionalized in the first place, since he tried repeatedly to commit suicide.

Alana, on the contrary, seemed to do really well, at least that's what Dr. Lecter had meant, although, he also said that he didn't want to take away from Alana telling Will everything about her that she wanted herself. Will was curious, obviously and tried to get some more information out of the psychiatrist, but he held the opinion, that his patient needed to talk to Alana himself.

"You will only find out, if you finally agree on meeting her", Dr. Lecter said for the umpteenth time these past couple days, because also in their current session, Will couldn't keep himself from wondering about his old friend.

“She really wants to see me?”, Will asked, but it wasn’t quite a question, rather an astonished statement. Somehow he still couldn’t believe, that he got that chance to meet Alana, his best friend through pretty much all of High School, again. So what exactly was keeping him from just saying yes? Yes, he wanted to meet her. He did. But at the same time, he almost dreaded it.

“Are you afraid that you wouldn’t know what to tell her?”, Dr. Lecter wanted to know.

“No, that’s not it…I always could talk to Alana perfectly well. She got me. And I want to apologize, I just want her to know that what I did…what my father did, isn’t excusable and I’m really sorry for what happened”, Will answered and he was in fact pretty clear about that. He’d imagined more than just once what he’d do or say if he ever saw Alana again. But now that he actually could, he still was reluctant.

“What else is keeping you from just meeting her?”

“I don’t know, actually…”, Will said, a little too fast. “Well, no. I guess…I do”, he added after a moment and sighed, because he didn’t really want to tell the doctor.

On the other hand, he’d learned by now, that talking to Dr. Lecter was easy, it helped him, he gave him thought-provoking impulse, he almost seemed to complement or complete his way of thinking, or his unfinished thoughts sometimes. It seemed rather weird, putting it this way, but this is just how it was. So, instead of keeping quiet, like he did when he first came into the hospital, when he almost detested talking to his psychiatrist, or telling him anything about himself, by now Will actually wanted to share his thoughts. It helped him putting at least some little rest to his otherwise troubled mind.

“You are afraid of what she might think of you”, the doctor meant. It clearly wasn’t a question and Will was nearly amazed by how accurate this was. Though, by now he’d stopped wondering why Dr. Lecter always seemed to know. Apparently he just was that good of a psychiatrist.

“It’s just…she’s out there, living her life, while I’m in here. And without you, I probably never even would know where she was, I’d never have seen her again. I don’t even know why she’d want to meet me, to be honest”, he explained with another little sigh.

“Why do you think, she actually wouldn’t want to meet you?”

“She doesn’t need to bother with my problems, you know? I don’t…I mean, I really would love to see her, but I don’t want her to see me like that…”

“Like what?”, the doctor dag deeper.

“Come on, you know exactly, what I mean”, Will all but snorted, because he was certain that he understood perfectly well.

“Maybe I do, but I want you to tell me, nevertheless”, he gave back, simply ignoring Will’s indignant tone.

“Look at me, I mean, what do you see? I’m at rock-bottom. I’m in a mental hospital, my mind is developed in some freakish way and there’s nothing interesting to tell about me, that I could offer. I’m no good company for anyone”, Will expressed the thoughts that have been bugging him for the past few days and put a hand over his face as if this could make him disappear.

“I’m looking at you, Will, and do you want me to tell you, what I see?”, Hannibal replied calmly.

He wasn't surprised that his patient thought so low of himself even if he regretted that Will did, but it wasn't uncommon to think there wasn't anything good left for him after everything he went through and had to experience. Yet there was a lot Will didn't, maybe also couldn't, see about himself and he wanted to try and point it out for him, because he really couldn’t stand seeing him in this negative state of mind once more. Actually he’d had the impression,

that Will had moved on a little in the last couple days, he knew he did, but Will himself probably didn't.

"I see a man, who was broken by the world surrounding him. First by your father, then by the people you came to for advice and help", he started and Will just sat there, listening curiously. Apparently he actually was interested in what Hannibal had to say about him.
"I see a man, who suffered and experienced horrible things that continue to haunt him. I see a man, who had given up on himself, because there seemed to be nothing left worth living for", here he stopped and waited for Will to directly look at him.

"But I also see a man, Will, a man, who chose to keep up the fight and make it through all the struggles, because by now, you might have realized that your broken pieces can be put back together again", Hannibal closed and almost was surprised by the fact that his patient still had kept up the eye contact with him.

That's how captivated he seemed by what the doctor just had said. And looking into these grey-blue eyes, Hannibal could see that he was correct. Will probably still felt insecure, but he seemed to have made his decision all along.

"You told me yourself, on that rooftop, that you don't feel the urge to end your life anymore...", here Hannibal stopped himself.

He remembered exactly what Will had said that night a little over a week ago. He admitted that it was because of him, that he didn't want to jump anymore. Hannibal hadn't questioned him further then, he didn't ask why, or what changed. He just was glad that Will seemed to have reached this point where he won back his will to fight.

"Remember?", he added then, to make Will think back of it.

He only nodded in return and then, as he did so often, averted his gaze.

"You chose life, Will. I know you did. You found your reasons to keep up the fight. What you're experiencing at the moment is mere self-doubt and it's perfectly normal. It's alright to re-think your motives, your choices, but in the end, you chose to live. And I know that you already made your choice about Alana as well."

"I did", Will finally admitted. "You're right, I did. I did choose life and I want to see Alana. Can you tell her, please?"

“Of course, I will”, the doctor answered naturally and gave him a little smile.

"Thank you", Will replied and Hannibal had the feeling that he meant for much more than just contacting his old friend.

"May I ask you a question?", Hannibal inquired then and he knew he shouldn't, but now that he already had ripped into it, he didn't want to stop himself.

"You already pose questions all the time, without asking me for permission first", Will gave back cunningly and the smallest hint of a smile graced his face.

"That's true, indeed", Hannibal agreed, also smiling slightly.

"But I just wondered, what you meant when you said you changed your mind about wanting to commit suicide…because of me", he said and didn't like the way he sounded at all.

What was he even doing? He shouldn't be asking this question with the intention he had in mind foremost. He could ask this question out of professional curiosity, but that's not why he did it now.

"Are you just narcissistic, or why do you need me to tell you what great of a psychiatrist you are? Isn't it enough, that I always seem to end up having to thank you for every little thing you do?", Will gave back and it wasn't at all what he meant to say, he didn't even know why he said it.

He also didn't mean to sound that harsh and angry. Or that annoyed. Because he wasn't and he didn't even have a proper explanation for why he just said what he said. Probably he'd just snapped, because he hadn't found a better way around.

"I'm sorry, I didn't want to…", he started to apologize then, because he knew, what came out of his mouth wasn't right. He didn't actually think that the doctor asked him, because he needed to hear that his therapy or his counseling was brilliant. This was ridiculous and Will knew it.

"I didn't mean that", he repeated, not daring to catch the psychiatrist's eye, because he felt already bad enough about what he blamed the other one for.

And he could sense that his doctor seemed to be rather disappointed by Will's reply. Well, he was himself. Why did he even say that? That wasn't at all what he meant. He meant to say quite the contrary, but he didn't know how. He didn't know, why he felt that way about Dr. Lecter. A feeling that made him angry now, for admitting back then on the rooftop that he was actually the reason Will wanted to keep on living. Because this was the truth. Will just didn't know how to phrase it otherwise and what to make of it.

It wasn't just the fact that without the other man, he wouldn't even be here right now. It wasn't because he literally saved his life that night on the bridge. He couldn't put it into words, what it was exactly. But he wasn't only here because of Dr. Lecter now, he also wanted to stay, because of him.

There just wasn't a proper way to express it yet and that's why he'd answered the only way he could, the way he always had: being defensive about his feelings, he couldn't and wouldn't articulate, rather daring to hurt someone else instead. That's the way he behaved, when he first talked to the doctor and he knew it wasn't right to fall back into that pattern. Yet he did and he couldn't quite say why, he just knew that the other one confused him. Mostly when it came to thinking about the reason why Will eventually had decided to keep on living.

"What did you mean, then?", the doctor asked and Will wasn't sure about the motivation behind this question. The only thing he clearly noticed was the hurt tone in Dr. Lecter's voice, although usually, that's not something he'd easily catch up on. Now he did, though and that confused him even more.

“I meant it how I said it…you are the reason I want to keep on living. That’s all I know”, Will gave back calmer and as he looked up for a moment, he could make out a faint glint in the doctor’s eyes that could only be held back tears. It just made him feel a little more baffled than he already was.

“Why did you actually ask me that question?”, he wanted to know after a while where none of them had spoken a word. It wasn’t just out of habit, although it could easily have been one of the many questions the psychiatrist used to ask. But this one was different, Will knew it. Otherwise Dr. Lecter wouldn’t basically have asked for permission first.

“I made a mistake. Questioning you about this now. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have, it’s nothing we should have to discuss at the moment. There are far more important things”, Hannibal gave back, it wasn’t the answer he intended to give, but it was the only one he should give.

He knew right away that he shouldn’t have gone there, he just confused Will. Otherwise he couldn’t explain his jagged comment earlier. It was almost like all the things Will had thrown at him the first couple days that he had stayed at the hospital. But from his behavior back then, Hannibal also had figured out, that this was just Will’s defensive mechanism. He believed him, when he told, that this wasn’t actually what he meant to say. Nevertheless, it was obvious to Hannibal, that he mustn’t show his feelings like that anymore in front of Will. He was his patient, after all. That’s what he had to remind himself of every once in a while. They couldn’t be friends, they could never be more than that either, it would only compromise Will’s recovery. Hannibal was perfectly clear of that, he just needed to brace himself a bit better next time.

“So, how soon, did you think, would you like to see Alana Bloom?”, he asked Will then, with a completely neutral voice, his face blank.

# An unexpected visit

Chapter Notes

Hey guys!
thanks a lot for reading, as always, and thanks even more for the kudos! :)
if you like you can also leave me any remarks, criticism, ideas, idk, suit yourselves :D
have fun reading!

There wasn’t much time for now to think about what happened with Dr. Lecter earlier, the way he behaved, or how he had made Will feel and react towards his odd question. Even if he actually wanted to try and figure out, what all this meant, there was indeed more important stuff he should be worrying about at the moment. For instance his diagnosis.

What did it even mean for him now? Alright, he didn't have Asperger's; so he had been misdiagnosed, but he guessed that this happened occasionally, or didn’t it? Especially with such a rare condition, that seemingly nobody could fully comprehend yet. His mirror neurons were developed extraordinarily, to put it in his doctor's words, on top of that, he had some kind of developmental disorder.

But what did this mean? What did he actually find out by getting this new diagnosis? He still didn't know if what he'd seen his father do, was true or not. He didn't know, whether his father actually killed his mom, or if it really all was just a way of his brain to cope with her suddenly being gone. Probably he should ask Dr. Lecter the next time to tell him more about what those mirror neurons actually could or could not do, or make him experience. Even if the doctor didn’t seem to know much about it himself, maybe he just needed to do some more research. He clearly could request him to do so, couldn’t he?

At least there could be a medical explanation for everything now, and Will knew he didn’t have to feel crazy anymore, but nevertheless he still felt odd. Nothing had been proven so far, well, nothing except that all the doctors he had seen before had terribly failed him. But apart from that, he wasn’t a single inch closer to any of the answers he has been looking for for such a long time.

Because the only other way to find out what really happened that night, maybe the only way to ever find out, was getting a hold of his father and questioning him about it. Alone the thought of this made Will flinch.

As if his father ever would admit to anything he did to him or his mother. He'd probably rather die than tell any of the horrible things he was responsible for. Will knew, that without his teachers who had witnessed him coming to school beaten up sometimes, there wouldn’t even have been a proof that his father had abused him. And without Alana telling her parents

about the assault, there wouldn’t even have been a case against his father at all. Even if the penalty he got was ridiculous and he should be out of prison a long time by now.

Still, the main problem was, that Will really didn't have a clue where his father currently was. He hadn't seen him in almost as long as he didn't see Alana. And even if he knew where he was, would he go and confront him? Wouldn't he put himself in danger again? Wouldn't it only outrage his father, finding out Will still had these suspicions about him?
Actually he didn't even want to imagine what could happen if he ever saw this man again, so he was glad that someone knocked on his door and saved him from having to indulge into these thoughts for any longer.

To his surprise, it wasn't a nurse who stood in the doorway, but Abigail. She smiled at him lightly and didn't look as pale anymore as the last time he'd seen her. Apparently being out of the hospital did her well.

"Hey there", she greeted him and her smile grew bigger as he mirrored it.

"Abi, what are you doing here?", he asked a little baffled, because he really hadn't expected to see her.

"Paying you a visit, obviously", she answered boldly. "Well, actually I am a little early for my session with Dr. du Maurier, so I thought I'd say hi", she added then, plopping down onto his bed.

"So, how are you doing?", she wanted to know then, before he could say
anything else.

"Ehm...there's been a lot going on", was the only thing he offered, because he didn't know if he was ready to talk about it to anyone besides his psychiatrist.

"Yeah?", Abigail inquired further and made him sigh.

He sat down at the other end of the bed and just stared at the blanket for a while.

"I made some tests...to find out about my condition", he finally started.

"Right, I remember you telling me that. Did you get the results back yet?"

"Apparently the mirror neurons in my brain are...exceptionally developed. So it's possible for me to experience the feelings of other people more purely,
almost the same way they do...", he explained, although he still didn't know what exactly this actually meant.

"But I thought...you got Asperger's? Isn't that quite the opposite thing of…being able to perceive emotions exceptionally well?", Abigail threw in, looking as confused as he felt.

"Actually I also got a...pervasive developmental disorder. It's not part of the autism spectrum, as Dr. Lecter said. And apparently these conditions combined are the reason why I am...the way I am", Will went on and Abigail still was just looking at him, but he didn't return her gaze, rather kept his eyes focused on his blanket.

"How are you doing, actually?", he wanted to know then.

"Better, I guess. I'll be going to school again soon", the girl returned, suddenly a little shortcut.

"Don't you like school?", Will asked, not so much because he'd noticed that Abigail didn't sound particularly thrilled about it, but because he tried to keep their conversation up.

"No, that's not it. I'm glad to be able to see my friends again...but...it's kinda tough, living with my grandparents, I mean", Abigail shared then.

"Why that, I thought you get along well with them?"

"I do, but I really miss my mom", she admitted and as Will looked up, because she sniffed a little, he could see a tear running down her cheek.

"I'm sorry", he said, because he really didn't know what else to say or do. He didn't want Abigail to be that sad, but he also didn't know in the slightest how to offer her some comfort. Probably, he guessed, he wouldn't even be good at that, if he didn't have some disorder that could be confused with Asperger's. How should he have learned anyways?

"What else has been going on?", Abigail just deflected, seemingly she didn't want to discuss this any further, and left Will puzzled for a moment.

"What?"

"You said there's been a lot going on", she therefore reminded him, brushing away her tears.

"Oh, right. Well…I'm gonna meet an old friend again. Probably already the day after tomorrow, if she's got time then", he told.

"Really? That's so nice! But I thought you didn't have any contact to anyone from your past anymore?"

"It's true, I didn't have a clue where she was. Dr. Lecter found her", Will meant, shrugging his shoulders.

"Your doc surely seems to go out of his way for helping you", Abigail commented.

"What do you mean?", Will wanted to know, a little insecure.

"He took you out to see your dogs, you seem to talk to him a lot, even apart from your sessions, and he helped you to find your friend. I don't think that's usually what psychiatrists do for their patients, don't they?", she summed up and Will couldn't disagree with that.

"He's a great human being. I guess…he's being really congenial and sympathetic, you know?", he gave back, not quite sure what else to say, as he was reminded of what had happened with Dr. Lecter before in his office. The way Will had felt and how the doctor seemed to hold back tears. What did this even mean?

“So, your friend”, Abigail distracted and Will was incredibly glad for it. “Was she your High School girlfriend or what?”, she grinned cheekily and Will didn’t quite know why she’d ask him that.

“No, I…she was my best friend!”, he said a little indignant.

“Calm down there, I was kidding”, the girl answered, laughing. “I’m glad she’s coming to visit you.”

“Yeah, me too.”

“Listen, I should go now. I’ve got to see Dr. du Maurier. But…if you’d like I can come around every once in a while when I’m here. I know you must be bored, at least I was”, she meant then and Will couldn’t have been happier about this prospect. It had gotten indeed incredibly boring in here the last couple days.

“Of course, I’d like that”, he replied, smiling lightly as she made her way over to the door.

“Okay, then I see you on Friday”, she said and waved at him a little.

“Thanks for stopping by today”, he meant and she just smiled in return.

“I’ll be back soon!”

“Okay”, Will only said, really glad about this, before Abigail finally left.

He actually missed being able to see her every day, if he had to admit so. Meals were more boring, even if he always liked to be left alone while eating. But having Abi’s company proved to be better than any other company he could get. He was tired of Franklyn and his chamomile tea, or Beth trying to get Tom’s attention. There was this new guy since a couple of days, just some teenager. Will didn’t even know his name and if he was being honest, he also didn’t care.

The only things he cared about were: when would he finally be able to get out of here? What would he do then? How would he get the answers concerning his father? What would he do, if he actually found out? And after that? What did he want to do with his life, then? He really didn’t have a clue about any of these things.

His whole life, at least ever since she disappeared, up until this very moment, always just consisted of finding out, what happened to his mom. Well, that and proving that he wasn’t crazy. Now he could tell he wasn’t, at least Dr. Lecter didn’t think he was and Will believed him. What was left now, was finding out, what actually happened. But after that?
He didn’t have a clue. Would he ever be able to lead a normal life? What was that even, a normal life?

Suddenly he wished he’d someone to talk about all of that, but he didn’t know whom he wanted to talk to. Not Abigail, she was too young to understand and she had problems of her own, he couldn’t just put his pressure on her. He didn’t want to be another reason she had to

feel bad, and also she had nothing to do with his whole mess, so it would be rather mean to tell her anything about that.

Probably not Dr. Lecter either, at least not, until he figured out what kind of weird thing was going on with him, with them. Could he tell Alana about all of this instead? Also rather not. They didn't see each other in almost ten years and he couldn't just bother her with everything that was going on in his life. That wouldn't be fair. She probably wouldn't even care. Or would she? But no, he couldn't put this on her, that wasn't something one just did after you didn't see each other for such a long time. They'd been best friends when they were teenagers, but now? They didn't even really know each other anymore, Will had to recognize.

Other than that, he didn't really have anyone he could talk to about all of these things. He knew, a conversation with his doctor would probably help him to draw some conclusions, maybe feel a little more at ease afterwards. But he really didn't want to talk to him about everything that went on in his mind, concerning finding his mom, or getting an idea what to do with his life afterwards, before he didn't even figure out, what was actually going on with Dr. Lecter himself. Why he behaved like he did earlier. It still confused Will extremely, because the doctor never struck him as someone so far, who'd easily show his emotions like he did earlier.

Will tried to focus and remember what it was, exactly, that actually happened in the doctor's office. Why did he flip and reply that angrily? Why was his psychiatrist so sad and disappointed about what Will had said in defensive mode? Did he actually believe Will meant those words he said? Probably he thought now, that Will was ungrateful, after everything he'd done for him. But why had it made Will this upset in the first place, just asking about what he said on the rooftop? Why was it so hard for him to acknowledge what this meant?

He wanted to keep on living because of his doctor. He was here because of him. He'd made him realize that there was still something out there for him. He believed him, he didn't think Will was crazy. He helped him in every way he could.

And Will trusted him, he liked being around him, liked talking to him. He actually liked him. Probably this was it. He never really had got close to anyone, ever. Well, maybe except for Alana, but that was in his past. There had also been that one girl in his freshman year of college who'd thought he was cute. But she'd lost interest in him pretty soon, probably he was too strange for her after all.

By now he also trusted Abigail, he liked her too. But it was different with his doctor. He wasn't just a girl who could be the little sister he never had. Dr. Lecter had always been not only helpful, but also courteous and likeable and friendly. Even if this wasn't how Will would have described him the first couple days that he knew him, by now that was how he felt about him, at least he guessed. He'd become friendly with his doctor and he was happy about it. That must be the explanation for what went down earlier. Why he was so confused about everything.

But he also knew that this couldn't go on forever, right? He'd leave eventually, he wouldn't need therapy anymore. Then he wouldn't need the doctor anymore for treatment. But he felt, that he still would need him in his life.

Probably that's what he was scared of, what made him get angry before. He lived, because this doctor had showed him how, and Will wasn't sure, if he could also do it without him. What he was sure of, after rethinking all of this, however, was that he needed to talk to Dr. Lecter and maybe apologize again. Probably he should even tell him, or would it be too weird, considering your psychiatrist as a friend? Or did the doctor also see himself as Will's friend and this was the real reason why he'd seemed so unhappy about Will's words?

# Asking for forgiveness

Chapter Notes

So, next chap is up! And Will's finally meeting Alana again ;)
have fun reading and thank you all, as always :)
p.s. I realized that I got some trouble with the punctuation, but I'm just as bad with this in my mother tongue tbh xD, so since english isn't my first language, I hope you forgive me for that!

Today was the day he'd see his best High School friend again. Ten years are an awfully long time going without seeing someone you were previously used to be around almost every single day. Saying he was excited didn't even begin to cover how he felt. Because being excited wasn't normally an emotion he felt that often. Sure, he was looking forward a lot to finally getting his dogs back when he got out of the hospital. But meeting Alana, after all this time, was totally different. It was something special.

It wasn't something he thought he'd ever be able to experience again. He'd thought that he'd lost her forever when she just left for college that summer without even really talking to him about it. But he'd understood her. After exposing her to his father and him taking advantage like he did, probably no one would ever have wanted to see him again. But Alana did. She wanted to meet him this morning and Will felt excited about it like he probably never had before.

It was 10:26am, a nurse had told him that Alana had scheduled her visit for 10:30am. Obviously Will couldn't just sit around and was pacing in his room instead. If he only had something useful to occupy himself with! All this waiting would probably make him turn mad, or worse, at least that’s what he supposed.

It was 10:33 and Will was still pacing. He couldn't remember anymore, if Alana was a punctual person or not. And he didn’t think that it was that easy to forget these kind of things. Will himself was, even overly-punctual. And he hated waiting. But he'd wait for Alana as long as it would take.

At 10:41 there finally was a light knock at his door and Will felt as if he might get a heart-attack. He just stood in the middle of the room for a moment, taking a deep breath, before he called:

"Come in!" eventually.

It suddenly seemed as if time had stopped, or only passed by agonizingly slow, like in slow-motion. The door was opened almost hesitantly and then, he finally got to see her.

Alana Bloom always had been a pretty girl. With her long, wavy dark brown hair, the pale blue eyes and light skin, Will had always considered her as really nice to look at. But now, with Alana being ten years older, not just a teenage girl anymore, but a grown woman, she was truly beautiful. Her hair was still long and dark and her cheeks were reddened from the cold outside. An almost shy smile was gracing her lips as she stepped into the room.

"Will", she said, nearly surprised, as if she hadn't known that he'd be here, waiting for her.

"Alana", was the only thing he got out, his mouth suddenly felt as if he didn't get anything to drink in ages. And as she stepped closer, he could see the tears in her eyes.

"My god, Will", she meant, her voice breaking and in the next moment, she'd thrown her arms around him and hugged him as if she didn't intend to ever let him go again.

But Will could live with that, because for the first time in like forever, he felt like everything would turn out okay in the end. So he hugged Alana back, smelling the rosy scent of her perfume and was almost left disappointed, as she finally took a step back again.

“Would you mind going for a walk outside?”, he asked her then, because suddenly he felt like he couldn’t stand being alone in this hospital room with her. It seemed to small of a space for an event as big as this one.

So they ended up walking side by side in the snowy park behind the hospital. At first they kept quiet, as if they both tried to figure out what of the many things, they wanted to say and ask, should come first. Will never had been great at small talk, but for the mere sake of avoiding having to talk about himself for a little longer, he asked Alana about herself eventually.

"So how are you? How have you been doing?"

"I cannot complain, everything's really fine. I'm working for the FBI in Quantico, Behavioral Analysis Unit. Also I'm engaged to a friend and colleague of your doctor", Alana told, smiling. "Without Hannibal being that observant...I wouldn't be here right now", she added then, thoughtfully.

"I can't tell you how glad I am about this coincidence, it's incredible", Will gave back, he still didn’t quite know how this even was possible. Probably there actually was something like fate, or how else could one explain a chance like that?

"Also, congrats to the engagement…is he a good guy?", he added carefully, because he wasn’t sure if he was supposed ask this, but he needed to know.

And probably there was also a tad of jealousy nagging at him. It wasn’t that he’d ever thought he’d have a chance with someone like Alana. She was one of the best and most precious persons he had ever got to meet. Agreeing to see him again after all those years, and after what happened, was proof enough of that. So she deserved nothing less. And

Will himself wasn’t this person, he knew that himself. So at least he wanted to make sure she was with someone who truly cared about her.

"The best, actually. I know this sounds cheesy, but…we complete each other", she gave back, grinning and Will could see she meant it.

"Then I'm happy for you", he said, smiling a little, it was all he needed to know.

"Thanks...Will?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry...for just walking out on you back then. I shouldn't have. I should have said something, I could -", she began then, but Will didn't want to hear any of that.

"Alana, no! Don't you blame yourself! You've got nothing to be sorry for! It was my mistake...I brought you home with me and then he knew...he wouldn't ever have known about you otherwise! He wouldn't have tried to hurt me by hurting you! It's my fault and I'm so sorry...I really still am. And I know it's real bad that this even happened, but...you've gotta believe me, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to put you in danger, ever...do you think you could forgive me?", it all burst out of him.

Everything he'd wanted to tell her for the last ten years or so, it all came out now. Probably he could have phrased some things differently, maybe he shouldn't have sounded so desperate, but he didn't care as long as he'd finally told her.

"It wasn't your fault, Will. I never thought it was", Alana replied, after she'd just stared at him, baffled for a moment.

She couldn't believe that Will had blamed himself, for what his father did, all this time. He'd suffered of something he'd never intended to happen, or could have foreseen, for such a long time and he was still ready to take the blame for it. She knew Will had went through a lot of self-criticism and self-blaming because of that and finding this out actually hurt her, because she didn't want for him to have to feel like this, not a second longer.

"Of course I forgive you...it was never your fault and I'm sorry I never talked to you about it", Alana added then and pressed his arm lightly, as if to underline her statement.

"I'm the one who should be sorry, because you couldn't find me this whole time and just tell me. I know you just needed to tell me and I'm sorry you had to wait this long...you had to go through everything on your own. And you came here all alone...", Alana started rambling and Will could hear her voice crack and as he looked at her, tears were running over her cheeks.

"I'm...I'm just glad you're here now. Everything else...it doesn't matter anymore now", Will brought out after a while.

He'd finally told her, how sorry he was for what happened with his father and she'd forgiven him. That's all he always wanted. He knew that he couldn't change anything what happened in the past, but Alana forgiving him and being here now meant everything to him.

"How comes you're here, actually?", Alana wanted to know as they had gone inside again and were sitting in Will's room, each with a coffee in front of them. Now that they'd sorted the

past out, she wanted to know about the obvious. Hannibal hadn't told her, obviously he couldn't, he was Will's doctor after all.

"I tried to kill myself", Will said, matter-of-factly. He didn't want to look for any excuses, he was tired of it, also he never had to pretend with Alana before, so he didn't either now.

"I…I tried to jump off a bridge…Dr. Lecter saved my life", he explained.

Alana didn't disrupt him, didn't ask him any further, because she knew he'd go on telling her everything, if she just waited for it. Will had never liked being pressured into telling something. He'd do so on his own terms.

"Nothing made sense anymore…there was nothing left for me. I told you about my father… and what I thought happened to my mom. But you were always the only one believing me. Nobody else did, none of all these doctors I went to. Until I met Dr. Lecter. He didn't think I was crazy…he…we made some tests and I've been misdiagnosed with Asperger's. It's true that I've got a pervasive developmental disorder that could be confused with it. But this isn't the reason why I…I experienced my father doing these things. I've got those mirror neurons, that…Dr. Lecter says they're developed extraordinarily. Well, apparently that's the reason why everyone seemed to think I'm crazy…", he told her, running his hands over his face, because suddenly he felt pretty leached out. There was too much happening at once.

"That's interesting", Alana commented. "Really intriguing, actually. There hasn't been a lot of research on this yet, but actually I've also read about this recently."

"What do you mean, exactly?", Will wanted to know.

"Mirror neurons. Some scientists believe that persons who are able to experience emotions of those around them, just like they do themselves…basically could have something like a look inside their minds. It's tough to understand, nobody knows exactly how it actually is possible yet. But there definitely is some agreement on that. What's missing though, are proves. It's all highly hypothetical so far", she explained, sounding really excited.

"Would you say it's possible…that…that I actually could have felt what my father felt when he killed my mother? Do you think it's actually possible?", Will had to ask. That's all he needed to know and if Alana had read about it, probably there was some clue she could tell him about.

"It could be. As I said, there aren't sophisticated tests on this yet, at least none that I'd know of. It's a greatly complicated matter", Alana said and Will only nodded in understanding, although this left him a little disappointed. It's all just could be's and what if's.

"Look, Will…I know that this isn't what you want to hear. But I cannot give you any other answer. Maybe Dr. Lecter can, I'm not your doctor and I don't know his research. But that isn't something we should be talking about. Now that I've found you again, I want to be here for you. But not as your psychiatrist. As your friend", she meant then.

"I understand…and thanks for being with me", he replied, gratefully. "I actually didn't think I'd ever see you again."

“Did you…have you ever tried to look for me?”, he added then, because that’s something he’d been wondering about a lot.
Especially when he just had started college and basically was all on his own. Himself, he’d tried to figure out where Alana went to, where she was, but only in the first few months. Eventually he gave up on it, because he guessed that she just didn’t want any contact anymore, she didn’t want to be found, so he better should leave her alone.

“Actually I tried. But not right away, only after a few years, when I was almost done with college. I wondered what you were doing by then and tried to get in touch, but I couldn’t, I didn’t know where you’d gone to, so I let it be…”, she gave back, already sounding regretful again.

“I guess it doesn’t matter anymore. You’re here now”, Will meant, smiling a little.

“No, it doesn’t…but you should thank your doctor for that”, Alana replied, smiling as well. “You know, I don’t really know him that well, but Frederick does and he said Hannibal has always been a really generous person. I’m glad you found a doctor like him, who’s properly treating you.”

“Do you think…that everything he’s doing…is too much? That he shouldn’t be caring that much?”, Will dared to ask, remembering Abigail’s words and his own thoughts from the other day.

“I can’t answer that, it’s not my position to judge. If this is how he wants to treat his patients, that’s totally fine with me. But honestly, it’s actually not advisable for a psychiatrist to get too close to their patients”, she replied and Will only nodded again.
How should he ever be able to figure his doctor out? He just didn’t get him, his motivation for doing all this for him. But now wasn’t the moment he wanted to discuss this any further.

“So, how long until you and Frederick are getting married?”, he therefore asked to come back to a safer topic.

# Heartfelt talks

Chapter Notes

Hey :)
I'm already back with the next chapter!
But I'm not quite sure whether I might have went too much OOC here?
anyway, thank you all so much for reading and I hope you enjoy this :)

"How did you feel about meeting Alana again?", his doctor asked him the next day in therapy. As usual, they were sitting opposite each other, but Will rather stared at some point on the floor, while Hannibal was mustering him curiously.

"Glad, I guess...I was pretty nervous yesterday, but now that we met and talked about everything, I'm actually kind of relieved", Will replied thoughtfully. All that mattered to him, to be honest, was that Alana was back in his life, one way or the other.

"Did it help you, seeing her again?", he went on inquiring. He needed to make sure that Will had benefit from this, since this was the whole point in making Alana come here.

"Yes, it's somehow like...there's been something crossed off of my bucket list. I've wanted to see her again for years, I did apologize...thanks for making this possible, Dr. Lecter", Will said and totally meant it.

Without him, he wouldn't have had that chance. He would probably still blame himself and wonder if Alana would ever forgive him. Now he knew she was
safe and more than alright and that was all he wanted. Also Alana had given him her number, so he could call her if he wanted, when she was back in D.C. And they had agreed on meeting again, eventually. But for now everything was alright between them.

"Please, Will, you're welcome. That went without saying!", Hannibal said naturally, although he perfectly well knew that it didn’t.

It seemingly had turned out to be the best thing he could have done. Will would profit from seeing Alana again, he knew that. But nevertheless he shouldn’t have just intervened in other people’s lives like this. He wasn’t supposed to, because it wasn’t really his call to make. But as long as everything went well, he very well could just be glad about it. And it wasn’t as if he didn’t ask Will first if he actually would want to get a chance and see his old friend.

"Alana said that it's probably not advisable for a psychiatrist to get too close to their patients", Will stated and baffled Hannibal a little. Why would he talk to Alana about his way of therapy? Did she think, he cared too much for Will?

"Do you feel that way, too?", he therefore wanted to know.

"I'm no psychiatrist. But obviously I highly appreciate everything you're doing for me. You've helped me a lot and I barely know how to ever thank you...", Will replied, looking up for a moment, locking their eyes, but then averting his gaze, as he always did, as the doctor smiled a little.

"It would help me, getting you out of this hospital, for starters", Hannibal said, only half-jokingly. "Do you mind me getting too close to your case?", he added then, more seriously, because he needed to know if Will was in any way uncomfortable with it.

"I could hardly say, I do. You're the reason I'm here, after all. I think, I know what I meant now...", Will gave back, biting his lip, as if not sure whether to go on or not.

"What did you mean?", Hannibal therefore encouraged him.

"When I said...on the rooftop...that you're the reason I want to keep on living...I think, I don't mind at all, to be honest", Will dared to explain. "I don't mind us getting friendly, because I feel understood...and I like your company."

For a moment Will wondered if he said too much. If he shouldn't have admitted that. If this was weird. Who said that to their psychiatrist after all?

"Will...I think I made a mistake. By getting too close here. Because, the truth is, I do, too, enjoy your company, the conversations we're having. A lot. But I'm your psychiatrist and you're my patient, so there shouldn't be this connection, we both feel, we're having. Our relationship should be, from my side, highly professional. And at times I don't feel like I can keep it at that. We shouldn't be having this discussion at all...but we do and I fear this is a sign that I stepped out of my line with you. And I'm sorry I did", Hannibal had to explain. He didn't want to say it like that, but he had to. He needed to at least try and keep this professional, although it probably was too late already.

"I don't want you to feel sorry. Because everything you did...you did to help me. I don't know if any other psychiatrist could have helped me the way you did. I feel safe…safer with you, because of you. And I don't want you to be sorry for that. I don't care if you're being highly professional or not...for me, you're not only another doctor. You're someone I like and trust", Will gave back, he didn't think that he'd ever been that honest with anyone.

And he also didn't care that his cheeks flushed and he suddenly felt hot. Because he finally had found the words to express how he felt about the doctor and that was, what mattered. He didn't have to retrieve into his thoughts again, while pushing the other one away, with words he didn't even mean to lose, as he did the other day.

"I don't want this to compromise your healing. Your recovery is my top priority. If this means that...I could find myself in a situation where I'm being led on to make unjust judgements, or that I'd do anything out of the ordinary to assure you're well, then I'm afraid, but I shouldn't be your doctor anymore", Hannibal said and it actually hurt him to.

"You have to understand, Will...if our relation was to get any closer and I made a mistake treating you, risking too much, or not enough, or wanting the best for you, but doing you wrong by that...then this wouldn't only be an obstacle for your recovery, but also my working ethics. Because I should be required to treat all my patients equally, which, I fear, I'm not anymore", Hannibal explained and it only just hit him then how true this was and what dangerous ground he was walking on.

"Do you...do you propose I should get another doctor?", Will asked and almost sounded scared, but mostly hurt, just as Hannibal felt himself. He couldn't have another doctor again, this wouldn't help at all. Besides, Dr. Lecter was the only doctor who'd actually helped him so far. The others only had misdiagnosed them all these years. That alone was point enough for him.

"I'm just stating what would be the wise thing to do in any other case. But I guess that we already established, you're not just like any other patient. I got too close to you the moment I held you back on that bridge", Hannibal said quietly and now it was him, who had to look away in order to not reveal his true emotions too obviously.

"I don't want another doctor", Will made clear. "I don't want any other doctor."

"I know", he returned for a loss of words which wasn't really a state he was accustomed to a lot.

"Will you stay professional then and keep the appropriate distance?", Will said and it wasn't that much of a question, maybe because he already sensed the doctor's reply.

"Doing this would require me to actually believe I could", Hannibal answered and it took him a lot of will not just to sigh at this situation he had brought himself into. What only had come upon him? It really wasn't at all like him to have these kind of emotional conversations with anyone, except for Bedelia maybe. If he didn't have overstepped his boundaries before, by now he totally had. So probably everything he said or did from now on, was just a confirmation of that.

"Why don't you think so?", Will wanted to know, sounding kind of curious. And yet again, he was surprised that the doctor had become emotional like this. It just didn't seem to be like him, then again, even if they'd spent a lot of time talking about a lot of things, Will still couldn't read the other man that well, mirror neurons or not.

"Because I'm in too deep already, since the moment I took your case. My compassion for you is inconvenient, Will", Hannibal admitted, using all the willpower he possessed to not just put his hands over his face and sigh at himself for the questionable decisions he currently made.

"So, you're helping me out of compassion?"

"That's how it turned out to be. I only didn't expect, that by doing so, I would end up actually liking you", Hannibal gave back and this probably was the most honest statement he'd ever made.

And now he couldn't take it back anymore. Admitting, that he liked Will, was different than just saying he enjoyed the conversations they were having. You could enjoy discussions you're having with your professors at college, without even finding them particularly interesting as persons, if only their subject and their knowledge was interesting enough. Hannibal hadn't quite figured out yet, what the most intriguing thing about Will was.

It certainly wasn't only his mirror neurons, otherwise he might have made Will's fear true by now, turning him into his guinea-pig. That wasn't something he intended to do, though. The reason for that was simple, he'd said it before, Will wasn't just any other patient. Something about him just fascinated him, it might have to do with the mirror neurons, but only in the widest sense.

Hannibal admired Will's thirst for answers. That he had come this far, even though he was being brought down all his life. But that he was at a point now, where he actually seemed to get a grip on things, even despite the obvious still bothering him. He'd suffered enough for the lifetimes of a whole bunch of people. Actually Hannibal was just a tiny bit proud of himself for being Will's reason for choosing life. He really shouldn't, though, neither should he think about him as sweet, or all the other things, he sometimes made him feel, when just looking at him. It was not right, actually as far from this as it could get. Yet, Hannibal seemingly couldn't stop himself.

"Is there anything else you wanted to talk to me about, concerning your state?", he wanted to know then, a weak attempt to get his control back over this whole situation.
That's what he should have done from the beginning, and not indulge into this heartfelt conversation about being or becoming a friend to Will, something he absolutely shouldn't be.

"Yes, actually there is", Will replied, not minding the change of topics, because this honestly had been too much emotional talk for a whole month. He really wasn't good at these kind of things, so he already was glad, that he'd mostly got to ask questions and not answer them.

"My mirror neurons…is there any chance you could find out more about their functions? Could you figure out for me…if…if what I told you about my father, actually could be true?"

"I can't make any promises, but I'll try my best", Hannibal answered, although his knowledge about these kind of happenings were limited and he didn't have much hope to find out something that could actually help Will with this whole affair.

There just wasn't enough material to come back to and it all still was a big mystery in brain research. But if there was anything he could do, he would at least look into it, because after all, he didn't just want to disappoint Will. Even if he couldn't give him any answers in the end, giving him this little string of hope was better than outright frustrating him.

"Okay…thanks, doctor", Will meant. After everything that Alana already said, he could guess that this wouldn't be easy and that he shouldn't expect anything soon, or maybe not at all. But there still was a chance that Dr. Lecter could find out something, if someone could, Will thought, then this doctor.

"You're welcome", he replied, and then, without reconsidering it, added: "And Will…after everything we were talking about today, I guess, it would be alright for you to just call me

Hannibal, if you'd like to."

# What went wrong?

Chapter Notes

Hey!
omg, thanks so so much for all the comments I got lately, this is truly such a great inspiration, it's just amazing :)
you guys really don't know how happy it makes me to see all the hits and kudos and read your comments, I'm so glad you love this story as much as I do!
Also I'd like to apologize in case I did mess up anything about the Freudian concept of transference, as said before, I'm no psychology student, just interested in the matter ;)

Luckily Will had been the last patient he had to see that day, otherwise he probably might not have been able to pay all the attention to someone else who also deserved it. His mind was racing, making him regretful, and wonder if what he did would turn out the most foolish, most careless thing he ever did in his life.

And that wasn't even exaggerated. He still didn't know what came over him, what brought him in this chit-chat mood, that he didn't even get into most times he had deep conversations with Bedelia. In fact she was the only one who might be able to help him out right now. So, he decided to just call it a day and let the paperwork be paperwork – which also wasn't like him at all - and stopped by at her office, hoping she didn't go home early as well. As it turned out, she still was there, caught up in reading some files.

"Hello there, may I distract you for a moment?", he asked, giving her a charming smile, although he didn't really feel like it at all.

"Always", she just gave back, her lips curling up slightly, as she looked up from her papers.

"Do you happen to have any plans for tonight?", he wanted to know, sitting down at the edge of her desk, just next to her chair.

"Not yet", Bedelia meant, inviting him to go on.

"Would you mind me coming over later? I could bring dinner, we could just talk", he suggested.

Bedelia looked at him intensely for a long moment before answering and he already knew that she might have figured him out. Sometimes she seemed to be able to read him better than he did himself, but that was probably just because they'd known each other so closely for such a long time.

"Are you just looking for some company, or is there anything in particular that you'd like to talk about?"

"Both, to be quite honest", he gave in, because it might be actually good to tell someone. In fact, he'd only hoped for something to distract his mind, but just talking to Bedelia always helped as well.

"Well, then I see you at 8:30pm", she said eventually, sounding as casual as ever.

"Great, I'll bring dinner", Hannibal agreed and then left to let her finish her work.

He'd cooked a pasta and vegetable casserole, because it was fast to prepare, since not even cooking seemed to help putting his mind to other thoughts like it usually did. So he didn't want to spend too much time standing around in his kitchen that evening and decided on that rather simple dish instead.

"You appear to be tense tonight", Bedelia observed as they were standing in her kitchen after dinner, doing the dishes. She put the towel away and run a delicate hand over his upper arm and shoulder blade, which made him relax only a little.

"Intense day at work?", she wanted to know, close to his ear and her breath made his skin tickle.

"You know we could talk about it, or...if this wasn't the reason you actually came over here, but rather to -", she tried to go on and still stepped a little closer, so that she was pressed against his back. Hannibal cut her off, though, and turned around so that their faces only still were mere inches apart.

"I don't think that's what I came here for tonight", he gave back in a low voice and didn't step away from her right away.

They did this, occasionally, being friends with benefits. It didn’t happen often and usually was a way for both of them to escape from things they rather didn’t want to be confronted with; when just talking about it wasn’t the right solution. They both seemed to have reached a silent agreement about it and sometimes it just seemed the proper thing to do. They’d found out early on that actually being together, or even living together, wasn’t for them. They loved each other, just not like that, they weren’t in love with each other. Being friends had always suited them perfectly well, but some exceptional situations called for exceptional measures.

"You're not sure?", she whispered back and leaned in closer to press a light kiss onto his mouth.

"Not quite", he gave back, shrugging, but instead of turning away, he captured her lips into a more forceful kiss for a moment. Just then he pulled away and walked over to open another bottle of wine. This wasn’t one of these situations, Hannibal decided. Talking would do best, it might actually help.

"No...that's not what I came over for, not tonight. I'd prefer if we could just talk", he said then, filling their glasses with red wine.
So they settled down onto the white couches in Bedelia's living room and she looked at him expectantly.

"What went wrong?", she asked encouragingly to make him tell his story.

She could sense that Hannibal wasn't alright, he barely behaved like he did today, ever. Usually, he wasn't reluctant, or undecided, he always tried to be in control, or at least make the impression that he had everything under control. But tonight he clearly lost this, she already realized earlier, when he came to her office, looking all but troubled. Also he never cooked casserole, it is way too easy of a dish to excite him and make cooking fun for him. Obviously it still tasted outstanding and he'd only used the most exquisite of ingredients, but it was more than unusual for him. And he'd never kissed her like that and then just turned away, this also wasn't like him at all.

"I could get myself into trouble for overstepping boundaries with one of my patients", he summed the whole mess up, without properly looking at Bedelia.

He didn't want to make it even easier for her to read everything off his face. Because if he actually had utmost control over himself most of the time, she would still always know if anything was up, otherwise she wouldn't even have asked him now.

"Are we talking about Will Graham here?", she wanted to know, raising an eyebrow.

Obviously she knew that Hannibal had had an unnaturally close bond to Will from day one, but that didn't even begin to describe it. She knew about the walks with the dogs, but that was about it. She didn't know about New Years Eve, Will's Christmas gift, who Alana Bloom was to him, or how exactly Hannibal felt about him. Well, that he didn't quite know himself either.

Bedelia took Hannibal's silence as the answer she suspected and went on asking instead.

"So, what did you do, exactly?"

Hannibal honestly didn't know where to start. What exactly did he do? Having incessant and ongoing conversations apart from their scheduled therapy sessions, where they weren't talking so much about Will and his mental issues, but about god knows what. Letting him see his dogs. Repeatedly. Allowing him to stay on a rooftop in the middle of the night, after he had to be admitted for attempted suicide from almost jumping of a bridge, just because he didn't want to ruin the moment. Letting Will become friendly by returning this sentiment. Calling in sick and driving a few hundred miles to meet Will's High School friend and talking her into meeting him. Offering him to be on a first-name base. Telling him how he felt about all of this and not truly regretting it.

"Will wants to be my friend", he just gave back.

"Transference, Hannibal! This is second semester psychology!", Bedelia all but admonished.

Obviously he knew that. He knew that in the process of building trust with a psychiatrist, by sharing the most personal and private of thoughts and memories and feelings, some patients tend to feel a close connection to their doctor. Which is why it is required from the psychiatrists themselves to show outstanding professionalism and not take advantage of such a situation. Hannibal didn't quite feel like he took advantage, yet he didn't feel free of guilt either.

"You also want to be his friend, don't you?", Bedelia went on, she truly seemed to have figured him out already.

"I'm not quite sure of what I want", he only said, giving up a defense that was never fully there.

"You can't be his friend, Hannibal", she just said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. Probably it was.

"I know that", he gave back, almost snippy. It was true that he didn't know what he wanted, the only thing he knew for sure was, that he couldn't return Will's sentiments.

"You're not able to stay away from him, either, are you", she stated then and cast an intense look at him, which he didn't break.

"I suggested that he might get another doctor", he meant, although it was only halfway true and a pretty weak attempt to actually persuade Bedelia.

"What's so interesting about him? His medical condition?", she asked, because she knew that Hannibal only cared a lot about the things that truly caught his interest. If he took an earnest interest in something, then he fully committed to it, he usually wasn't one to do things only by halves.

"I'm not simply intrigued by his beautiful mind", he replied and could have slapped himself for this choice of words. Maybe this was the influence of the wine, though. It had to be.

"Oh, you didn't", Bedelia said in a voice that might indicate she'd just heard something scandalous. She didn't need to have studied medicine and become a psychiatrist to put this picture together. At least she thought she'd got the hang on what was going on with her best friend.

"What did I not?" He tried to sound casual, but couldn't keep a nervous pitch out of his voice.

"Did you become infatuated with him?", Bedelia wanted to know, a stern tone in her voice.

"Excuse me?"

He'd expected everything. Everything from: did you make a mistake in his therapy? Did you treat him wrong? Did you agree on being his friend? Did you tell him he could take his dogs to the hospital? Something along these lines, well, maybe not the last one, though.

But this question caught him off guard almost completely. He hadn't really want to think about it so far. He couldn't, shouldn't even maybe. Obviously Will did interest him in many

ways, and this might also be one of them. But this would even be worse than just being friends with him. So he'd rather pushed these thoughts to the back of his mind so far, because he rather didn't want to figure it out, not yet, probably not ever. He shouldn't, mostly for Will's sake, but also for his own.

"You are not in your usual, calm and deliberate state of mind. You weren't the whole evening. What happened with Will Graham?", Bedelia just asked back, instead of explaining her prior question properly.

"Nothing did happen. Our conversation got a little emotional, that is all what happened", Hannibal replied, not really willing to give away more, because he was angry about Bedelia's prior assumption. Why would she figure that he was infatuated with Will?

"What did you tell him?", she meant.

"I don't have to tell you", Hannibal said and he knew it was an absolutely childish thing to do. Why did he behave like that all of a sudden? It was downright ridiculous.

"Hannibal, please…you came here to talk. What is wrong with you?", Bedelia gave back, frowning and sounded almost a tad annoyed by his behavior.

"I offered him to call me by my first name, because I actually like him. Is this what you want to hear, Bedelia?"

"I don't want to hear anything in particular, I was just asking", she explained and then leaned over to re-fill his glass of wine.

"What are you doing? Making me drunk, so that I'll readily answer your questions?", he asked, almost amused.

"Obviously not. I figured you could need it", she just said, matter-of-factly. "So…you like him?", she added, raising an eyebrow, waiting for an explanation.

"As a friend", Hannibal only returned, taking a sip of his wine.

"Did my question before bemuse you?", Bedelia wanted to know then and his silence was enough of an answer to make her sigh.

"Hannibal, you know that this most likely could be transference, right? I mean from Will's side. And what you're feeling, what you think you're feeling...could just as well be countertransference, you're aware of that, aren't you?", Bedelia said, more quietly now, because she actually felt a tad of understanding for her best friend.

She knew that Hannibal most certainly had thought about this himself, but she wanted to point it out again. She couldn't just let him spiral down into whatever this might be. He could lose his accreditation over this if it turned out badly.

"It could be", he simply said.

"How sure are you?"

Actually Will showed signs that could lead them to the conclusion that this phenomenon might be applicable for this situation. He'd been all alone through his suffering for such a long time, he'd even admit that Hannibal was the first doctor to believe his story. Obviously he must have wished for a friend at his side all this time, since he didn't have Alana. Will also admitted himself that he liked and trusted him and this might very well be because he had believed him and tried to actually help him. It would be more than likely if Will just transferred his need and wish for someone, who finally understood him, onto the only person available. But why did Hannibal himself return these sentiments then? He wasn't an amateur after all. He was one of the most renowned psychiatrists around.

It was classical, though, if one just looked at it from the right angle. Transference and countertransference, that's the easiest way to explain. How could he be so blind, so ready to give up the neutral ground he was supposed to be standing on? Then again, one should never just jump to the simplest conclusion, Will and his misdiagnosis was the best example for this. And that was actually the point that worried him the most.

"I'm just afraid if it isn't. If it cannot be explained like this", he admitted.

Yes, it was the obvious thing, the easy explanation. But for some reason Hannibal doubted it all were just transferred feelings, projected onto the only one around. He didn't feel that it was like that. It was tough to pinpoint why exactly, but it all just felt entirely different.

"It seems like my mind doesn't function anymore when it comes to Will Graham. I know, what's the right thing to do, but I still end up only doing what's...what I think is best for him. And that doesn't necessarily mean that it's the just choice to make medically seen", he confessed and was glad he could get this out.

"You're probably doing what's best for you, too, though. If you only did, what was best for him, you wouldn't doubt doing the right thing. Doing the right thing would be to give away his case to another psychiatrist", Bedelia considered.

"I can't do this to him", Hannibal answered, determined.

"Why not?"

"He doesn't trust anyone else. I cannot put him through this whole process again. He isn't like anyone else, it would harm him", he explained and realized something else.

"Now you even did admit it!", Bedelia chided him. Yet she gave him a sympathetic look and reached out to put a hand on his lower arm. He appeared to be deeper into this than he might even be aware of himself.

"That's not what I meant", Hannibal threw in, before she could go on. He'd remembered one of his other patients instead who actually showed all the signs of transference every time he talked to him and Hannibal was absolutely sure in this case. Will wasn't like that, though, at least he didn't feel he was.

"I'm treating this one patient, who…admires me, who thinks he wants to be like me", he explained and hoped, he could make Bedelia understand. "I think he might even fancy me",

he added then thoughtfully.

Yet in this case Hannibal was painfully aware that his patient only transferred his hopes and wishes onto him and he tried to make this clear to the patient as well, because that's what he was supposed to do as a psychiatrist. Awaken the patient to his problems and help him to find a way to deal with them. In Will's case though, he couldn't really see this occurrence from Will's side. Everything they said and did, every interaction felt genuine and right, even if it maybe wasn't. And therein might lie the problem.

"And Will Graham doesn't?", Bedelia then wanted to know, skeptically.

"I don't know?", he gave back because he truly didn't want to think about this right now.

"Do you? Fancy him?", she kept on asking, basically repeating her prior question.

"I don't know", Hannibal now replied.

# A most selfless offer

Chapter Notes

Hey there, I'm back with the next chapter :)
Thanks a lot to all of you for reading, liking, commenting, I really, really do apprecciate this a lot, it's stunning :)
Also I don't really have a clue about the American health insurance system, all I heard is it sucks, so in case I messed anything up, I apologize for that!

Will had learned early on that reality always brought you down again one way or the other. If there was something like fortune, then there also had to be misfortune, obviously. Apparently the last few days had went a little too smooth for him, at least better than he'd expected it to be only a little while ago.

He finally had a correct diagnosis, and even if he didn't quite know yet, what to make of it, he actually had something like faith for the very first time that he'd find out eventually. Also he'd seen Alana again and she'd forgiven him, wanted to be his friend. He'd even made a new friend with Hannibal and didn't find it strange in the least that he also was his doctor. Probably he did in fact understand Will better than anyone else, because he was a great psychiatrist; but that was definitely not the reason he was one of the few persons, Will actually got along with pretty well. It had never been easy for him to make friends, he never liked being around people too much, just didn't know what to say, what to do, or how to behave. Hannibal was one of these very few people, though, whom he really enjoyed being around, whom he was pleased to talk to and whom he actually liked. And that wasn't something that happened to him often. So it wasn't only amazing how well they got along with each other, but also that Hannibal seemed to be willing to give up his neutral position, he should be taking as a doctor, and rather embraced this friendship with Will.

Sometimes, though, the amount of good things that happened to you, appeared to be used up eventually, at least for the moment. Then misfortune happened, as Will had to experience this day. Unless there was someone who showed up to prevent it.
He was drawing one of the snow covered trees outside, when a nurse walked in, accompanied by a man dressed in a black suit, carrying a briefcase.

"Hello, Mr. Graham. This is an agent of your insurance company who'd like to talk to you", the nurse informed him and then left again.

"Good morning, my name's Travis Sullivan, I'm here to inform you about your health insurance", the man said and Will put away his pencil, mentioning for the other one to take a seat.

“It came to our attention that you’ve been here for the past five and a half weeks. You have received medical and psychological treatment for the past 52 days now. The insurance level you chose only provides 60 days of coverage, however. So, I want to make aware to you that you’ll either have to leave this facility by the end of next week, because you won’t have claims to any further treatment anymore then, or you’ll negotiate a new insurance level that will also cover the costs for upcoming therapy”, he explained and Will was baffled for the first moment. He didn’t even really think about this yet. The main thing was, that he had insurance at all, but he never really cared about what it did actually cover. Sure, he’d been in the hospital before, but not for this long, he’d never had such thorough therapy. He’d even paid for some of the therapy sessions with prior psychologists in cash.

“I don’t think I’ll be able to leave by then…did you talk to my doctor?”, he said after a while, staring down onto his drawing. The shadowing wasn’t perfect and he’d have to work it over.

“Not yet, I first wanted to check in with you, but the nurse already told me that it seems like you should be here for another while”, the insurance guy gave back.

“Well, I don’t think I’ll be able to afford this”, Will said, matter-of-factly and tried not to panic. He couldn’t stop his treatment yet, he couldn’t just leave now that there finally was some improvement. But what else should he do? He didn’t even have a job.

“I could present all of our insurance models to you, if you like. Maybe there is something that you’ll find appealing?”, Sullivan offered and opened his briefcase to take out some flyers and magazines.

“What sum are we talking about?”, Will wanted to know. “I mean, at least?”

“You can see the costs for the different models here”, he said, pointing it out to Will.

“This are the costs per month?!”, Will said, a little shocked, because he definitely wouldn’t be able to afford this. He actually was lucky that the insurance was even covering everything so far, but he’d also paid in a lot while he still had his jobs.

“Yes, those are all monthly costs”, the insurance agent confirmed.

“I can’t afford that”, Will muttered again, putting his hands over his face, sighing. “There’s no way I could afford this right now.”

“Well, then the only thing I can do for you, is reminding you again, that you’ll have to stop receiving treatment within the next eight days”, the man said, putting his flyers back and preparing to leave.

“Wait, this is all? This is all you do?”

“You can’t pay, you don’t get insurance, it’s as easy as that, Mr. Graham”, Sullivan gave back slickly and then excused himself, because obviously, Will wasn’t his only client.

After he’d left, Will sat in his chair motionless, just staring onto the small table where the magazines and flyers just had laid. He knew that the health system wasn’t fair, but he hadn’t

guessed that it would be like that. Also that the insurance agent was that cold and showed such lack of any sympathy. He felt left alone and clueless, what was he supposed to do now? Obviously the prospect of getting home that soon was intriguing, but he wasn't sure at all if he could handle it. Actually he almost dreaded it, because it felt pretty strange to go home now, like he didn't even know what he was supposed to do there. He wasn't sure how he should go on there. How he should go on without his therapy.
Probably it even was a good thing, finally getting out of the hospital, even if he didn't know how he should suddenly adjust to this again. But it definitely wasn't the best news that he should just stop his therapy. He couldn't, not yet, he needed his doctor, he was the only one Will trusted to help him. What else should he do without him? He didn't find out anything about the mirror neurons yet, he still needed to know, because it felt to him, like he couldn't go on without knowing the truth. That's the utmost reason that made him function at the moment, he still didn't have an answer to the most pressing of his questions and he wanted to finally get it.

Suddenly Will realized that his eyes were burning and hot tears were running down his cheeks. This wasn't fair. He couldn't give up now that he finally came a little closer. Also what would he do without being able to see Dr. Lecter? Talking to him made him feel at ease, it calmed him down, made him less anxious and worried. For sure Hannibal would still want to see him, right? But would he still treat him, if the insurance wouldn't pay anymore? The doctor wasn't the social service after all.

Everything felt numb now, everything that had seemed a little brighter and easier to stand the last couple of days, now seemed to have darkened again. He didn't know what to do. At all. He was scared and couldn't even imagine how to handle it if he was on his own again. The only reasonable thing for him at the moment was lying down onto his bed and disappearing under his blankets. He couldn't even begin to think of any solution, of any possible way out, a way to fund the insurance and pay for the therapy he obviously needed. So that's why he just lay there, dark thoughts approaching and pulling him down, until he was shaking and couldn't move out of it.

The thing bringing him back, out of this state of utter desperation, was a familiar voice calling his name lightly and a hand brushing back his hair softly.

"Will? What happened, do you hear me?", Hannibal asked, clearly worried. Will's face was pale and sweaty and his whole body was shaking, he almost feared that he was experiencing a seizure.

"Are you with me?", he heard the doctor say as he tried to focus while he pulled him up into a sitting position. Hannibal gently put a hand on his cheek that Will grabbed like a lifeline.

"Look at me, Will", the other one said and he tried to comply.

He focused on Hannibal's light brown eyes that displayed obvious worry, but also a tad of relieve and something Will couldn't put a name on.

"I need you to lift your arms", he said, taking his hand away to give Will some space for that. Apparently it wasn't a seizure after all. "Very good. Now talk to me…what happened, do you remember?"

“I…can’t pay…and I, I need to leave”, Will managed to stutter incomprehensively.

“What do you mean?”, Hannibal wanted to know, handing him a cup of water. “Here, drink this.”

“My insurance…I, I can’t pay for it. And I need to get out of here by the end of next week”, he said, making a little more sense now and taking a sip of water, his hands still shivering.

“Who told you so?”, Hannibal asked, frowning a little. He wasn’t particularly pleased to find Will in such a state of despair once again and silently cursed the person who’d brought this upon him.

“The insurance agent who was here earlier. I can’t afford another insurance model that covers further treatment. So…I…I need to leave and…I…I can’t see you anymore. I don’t know what to do…I don’t think I can go home, can I go home? But I need to talk to you…you can help me, right? You can still help me?”, he meant, sounding desperate and brushed some new tears away.

“Will...listen”, Hannibal returned, taking his still trembling hands into his own, trying to calm him down. “You will be fine at home, I will see to this, I promise. You won’t be alone.

Leaving the hospital doesn’t mean you will be left alone again with everything that’s still bothering you”, he said, pressing Will’s hand lightly in reassurance.

“But you can’t treat me anymore…can you? If the insurance doesn’t cover it…you can’t be my doctor anymore…”, Will replied, still looking really pale.

“At least not officially, no”, Hannibal meant and made Will look up at that.

“What do you propose?”, he said, frowning.

“I won’t be able to treat you officially. So I won’t be your psychiatrist anymore. But, as your friend, I’ll obviously still be here for you. You can talk to me whenever you need me, which won’t affect your therapy at all. Let me just treat you pro bono”, Hannibal suggested.

“You’d do this for me?”, he was totally taken aback by this offer. Obviously he knew by now, that Hannibal was one of the best and most generous people he’d ever met, but this had to be the most selfless thing anyone ever did for him.

“Well, I just offered”, the other one returned naturally.

"Why are you being so good to me?", Will asked, almost stunned. He'd never had someone in his life who went to such lengths in order to make sure he was alright, he was helped and cared for. No one ever did.

"Who doesn't help their friends when in need?", Hannibal replied with the slightest of smiles and this made Will cry again, because he couldn't believe how lucky he was to have someone like Hannibal.

"It's alright", the doctor said, patting Will's shoulder lightly. "You will be fine, Will", he repeated, thinking Will was still upset about the insurance, although it was out of overwhelming gratitude.

"How could I ever return this favor?", he finally got out, looking at the other man with red eyes.

"By getting better", Hannibal simply replied.

# Of Landlords and Italian Novels

Chapter Notes

Thanks a lot to you all for your continued interest in this story, it makes me truly happy, you don't have any idea :)
The end of this chapter is a bit fluffy and you might probably fangirl, at least I did while writing it, so I'm just warning you in advance ;D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He didn't think it would actually be that tough leaving the hospital. When he first was admitted, he absolutely detested it and wanted nothing more but to get out of it. Now that he actually had to leave, he wouldn't mind staying a little longer, though.

He said his goodbyes to Beth and that elderly lady whom he never really got to know. Tom wasn't there anymore, he'd also got to leave a couple days earlier. Then he said goodbye also to the nurses and silently thought, that this actually was a good reason to be happy to get out of there. No more nurses who wanted to persuade him to do anything he didn't want to do.

After that he took his bag with his clothes and other belongings and turned around, where Hannibal was waiting for him. It was a Friday afternoon in the middle of January and the doctor had offered to finish work early so he could take Will home. There wasn't really anyone who'd do so otherwise. Alana was in D.C. after all. He'd called her, though, letting her know that he'd be home again from now on. She was glad for him and told him she'd try to visit him there sometime soon, if possible. He hadn't told her that he actually was afraid of being home alone again. Neither did he mention that he only had to leave because he couldn't pay for a longer stay and that he'd feel better if he didn't have to go home just yet.

So they drove in Hannibal's Bentley until they arrived at the block where Will was living. He hadn't been there in over a month and it felt more than strange to suddenly be here again. That's why he was really thankful for not being on his own in this moment, that Hannibal accompanied him. It was a little easier to bear this way. As he fumbled with his keys, someone opened the door from inside, before he could even turn the lock.

"Will!", his landlord and former employer called out when spotting him on the doorsteps. "Where are you showing up from now?"

"Jack, what are you doing here?", Will asked back, baffled, because Jack Crawford was the last one he'd expected to meet here right now.

"I…came home last week. Bella died…", Jack mentioned almost casually.

"I'm sorry, Jack, really", Will meant and then stared at his feet, because he didn't know what else to do or say.

"So, where have you been? Who's your comrade here?", Jack deflected. Seemingly he wasn't ready to talk about Bella and Will respected this.

"I've been at the hospital. This is Hannibal Lecter, my...friend", Will gave back. It was a weird feeling to actually introduce Hannibal as his friend, it was something he wasn't really used to do.

"Are you okay?", Jack asked a little worried directed towards Will and then shook Hannibal's hand in greeting.

"I guess I'll be", he just replied, playing around with the cord of his backpack.

"Alright, then...I need to do some business, I'll see you around!", Jack meant, patting Will's back and then walked over to where his car was parked.

"That was my landlord. Also I used to work for him, before...before all that", Will explained, as they ascended the stairs to his flat.

“Maybe you could ask him for help finding a job. It could be good for you to get some distraction”, Hannibal suggested. “He was the one who owned a car repair shop wasn't he?"

"Yeah, but he sold it to afford his wife's therapy...I don't know what he's into now...but sure, I could ask him, I guess", Will said thoughtfully, and finally stepped inside his flat again after all these weeks. It obviously all looked like he left it back then, just a little dustier.

"I was just making a suggestion here, obviously you don't need to follow it, if you'd rather look for something else...but I figured it would be nice having something to do that you're used to. Meanwhile you could think about what you really want to do, you know?", Hannibal explained and Will only nodded.

"I know what you mean, yeah. I'll see", he answered, putting his bag away.

Suddenly he felt empty, as if something was missing, but he didn't seem to realize yet what exactly it was. It just appeared odd to be back here, to finally be back here and also being supposed to stay.

"Thanks for bringing me", he said after a while, looking at a point on the wallpaper to the left of Hannibal's shoulder.

"Will you be alright for now?", his friend wanted to know, mustering him with some concern and Will hated it. If Hannibal already seemed to have doubts about leaving him alone in his own flat, how should he not be scared and confused about this then?

"I guess...", he only muttered.

"You can call me whenever you need to, you know this", Hannibal meant encouragingly. "And if you don't mind, I'd like to come around tomorrow to check in on you?", he added, but it sounded like a question.

"Yeah, okay", Will simply returned.

"Would you like me to stay for a little while? I could...cook something for you, if you're hungry?", Hannibal then offered, but Will only shook his head.

"I think...I need to be alone now. And I'm not hungry", he gave back, his gaze directed at the floor once more.

"You'll call me if you need anything", Hannibal repeated and Will nodded again.

"Okay."

"I'll see you tomorrow then", the other man said and pressed his shoulder slightly, before he looked at Will again for another moment and then finally turned to leave.

After Hannibal had left, Will plopped down onto his couch in the living room and sighed. There seemed to be so many things to do, like unpacking his backpack, dusting and getting the flat a bit tidier, checking which groceries he'd have to buy the next day and all this stuff. However, he felt up to nothing of that. It was like he couldn't move, he didn't even have enough energy to shift into another position. He hadn't thought that it would be this emotionally and physically exhausting just to leave the hospital and come back home. Actually it wasn't at all what he'd pictured all these first days at the psychiatric station. He always thought he'd be happy. Now he just was endlessly tired. So tired that he hadn't even realized that it were his dogs that were missing.

He simply seemed to have forgot and only remembered, when he was startled out of another one of his nightmares hours later. Then he felt terrible about it, because how could he ever forget about Winston and Wesley? The poor animals had to spend the last six weeks or so in that shelter and now that he finally could have come and got them, he just forgot! For a moment he panicked and already wanted to grab his jacket and go and get them immediately, but then he realized that it was pitch dark outside by now and looked at the clock on the wall. It was about 9:30pm and there wasn't any chance that he could just show up at the shelter now and get his dogs, since there would be no one there right at this hour.

So he shuffled into the kitchen and filled a glass with water at the sink that he just drowned down. His head ached and he still felt extremely weak and tired, so he went over to his backpack and pulled out the capsule with the pills his doctor had prescribed for his constant weariness. He'd had the feeling so far, that they actually helped a bit, but maybe he was wrong, or maybe the effect already had faded off and he needed another dosage. That's why he rather put them back, they probably wouldn't do him well anyway and got himself some aspirin against the headache.

Then he trudged into his bedroom, where he settled onto his bed and just waited for sleep to drag him down again. But it didn't come to his release, instead he kept beating himself up over the dogs and already sensed how anxiety and self-doubt started creeping over him. Probably they were better off at the shelter without him, he didn't even care for them those past few weeks. If he couldn't even care for his dogs, how was he supposed to take care of himself? He didn't even unpack his hospital clothes because he was too tired, how was he supposed to do anything, like, getting a new job? What if Jack couldn't help him? What did he even really want to do? He didn't know and it just scared him to the point where he couldn't properly breath anymore, which made him panic even more.

Since he didn't really have any idea what else to do about it, he reached for his phone on the nightstand to dial Hannibal's number, while trying to focus on his breathing, but he couldn't manage, his fingers were trembling too hard and his heart was beating too fast. With the third try he finally managed to dial correctly and then just lay there, his blood thumping in his ears, while the phone rang.

"This is Dr. Lecter speaking", he finally heard the other one answering the phone after what felt like ages, but it actually had rang only a couple of times.
Will didn't manage to say something right away, his mouth was too dry and his hands were still shaking so much that he almost let the phone drop.

"Hello?"

"Hannibal…", Will finally got out, his voice nearly breaking.

"Will, are you alright?", the other one wanted to know, obvious worry in his voice.

"I just…I just…I can't breath", he managed, heart still pounding hard against his ribs.

"You need to focus, okay? Sit up if you can and try to focus on your breathing, do you hear?", Hannibal advised and Will tried to do what he said.

"Now take slow and deep breaths, count to ten in between", he went on and Will tried to follow.

"Are you feeling better?", Hannibal asked after a while and Will only nodded, before he realized that he couldn't see this.

"I think so", he mumbled, already feeling a bit calmer.

"What did happen? Do you want to talk about it?"

"I was just…thinking. And then, I…I guess I panicked", Will explained, still focusing on his breathing. "My dogs…they're still at the shelter", he meant then.

"Do you want to go and get them tomorrow? We could go there, I'll come with you if you'd like me to", Hannibal proposed to calm him down.

"Yeah, yeah I'd like that", Will replied and felt warmth spreading in his chest at that prospect.

"Do you feel better already?", Hannibal repeated, there was still some concern left in his voice.

"Can you tell me something?", Will asked, because he actually felt better just knowing that Hannibal was there at the other end of the line.

"What do you want to hear about?", the other man asked back.

"Anything", Will said, lying down again, the phone next to him.

“Before you called, I was just reading Boccaccio’s il Decameron. It’s a series of a hundred short novels written in the 14th century and set in Florence. Do you want me to read some of it to you?”

“Is it in Italian?”, Will wanted to know, the slightest smile spreading on his face. This was just the book he’d imagine Hannibal to read.

“Yes, if you don’t mind?”, Hannibal replied, he almost sounded undecided now.

“It’s perfectly fine”, Will gave back and then, without further thinking about it, he added: “I just…I really just wanted to hear your voice.” He could feel his cheeks grow hot as he realized what he actually just said, but he didn’t care, Hannibal couldn’t see him after all. And it was the truth, just talking to Hannibal and listening to him helped to put his mind at rest.

“I didn’t know you could speak Italian”, he quickly said then, burying his head in his pillow.

“You never asked me about it”, Hannibal answered and Will could almost hear him smiling.

“Are you reading now?”

“Alright”, he meant and then went on in Italian.

“Li quali, avendo la giovane veduta bellissima e che ancor lor non vedea…” *

Listening to Hannibal’s soothing voice reading to him in Italian eased him even a bit more and didn’t leave him feel so alone anymore. He was too exhausted to care what the other actually read, it could as well be in Chinese or Lithuanian, although he doubted that this would sound as melodically. Sometime between all these beautifully pronounced expressions Will finally had grown calm and tired enough to eventually drift off to some much needed sleep.

Chapter End Notes

* Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron, Novella Sesta, p. 449

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